

WILDERNESS CLEARING

WALTER D. EDMONDS



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Edmonds
Wilderness Clearing



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WILDERNESS CLEARING

Books by

WALTER D. EDMONDS

ROME HAUL

ERIE WATER

MOSTLY CANALLERS

DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK

CHAD HANNA

YOUNG AMES

THE MATCHLOCK GUN

TOM WHIPPLE

TWO LOGS CROSSING

WILDERNESS CLEARING

WILDERNESS CLEARING

BY
WALTER D. EDMONDS

Illustrated by
MARC SIMONT



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New York 1949

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FOR SARAH

Foreword

ONE day, several years ago, after DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK had been published, a rather bulky letter came for me in the morning mail. It contained, besides the message, a small yellow envelope of the sort designed to hold pills—but instead of pills there was a tooth, brown and dull with age, from a child's jaw,

The superscription printed on this little envelope was as follows:

DR. C. G. STROBEL

56 S. MAIN STREET DOLGEVILLE, NEW YORK

Hours: Until 9 A. M., 12 to 2 and 6 to 8 P. M.

INTERSTATE PHONE

Then on the ruled lines following the word DIRECTIONS was written in a slanting hand in faded ink:

FOREWORD

"Lower incisor tooth removed by myself from skull supposed to be that of one of the Mount boys, who was killed by Indians—unmarked grave on bank of Mount's Creek. I dug down to bones. 1886. Town of Ohio."

The letter to which I turned next related that Dr. Strobel as a boy had been raised in the town of Ohio on the shore of Mount's Creek, and that the house was only a few rods from the alledged burial place of the two murdered Mount boys. He had been told it was "just a legend," but being a curious boy he one day got a grown up neighbor and began to dig at the spot of the supposed grave. After going about three feet down, "I saw some bones, the uplifted face of a small child. I removed the two lower incisors and carefully closed the grave, settling the little stones in a somewhat erect position. This grave is right on the crest of the slope leading down to Mount's Creek, a cowpath running right over it. My brother now owns the old homestead, now also the (Turner) farm— One lower incisor of Mount's boy inclosed."

The Mount boys had been murdered by two Indians named Cataroque and Hess in the fall of 1777 for the sake of the \$16.00 and the copper kettle their scalps would bring that year at Fort Oswego. It was only a small episode in the opening of the Revolution in Northern New York, but it served to warn our own people that the Indians had been turned loose against them. After it happened, every man who heard of it knew that there would be no safety anywhere along the border settlements for any one

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out of gunshot sound of the Mohawk Valley forts.

The local histories do not tell us what the Mounts looked like or how they acted. We only know that there was a man named Mount who settled on the creek that bears his name in Jerseyfield, now called Ohio, and that he had sons and a Negro boy. The histories vary in the account of his children—one, for instance, claims he had a daughter.

We know also that there was a man named Gordon who bought a lot in the Jerseyfield Patent and built a saw mill on Black Creek. He may or may not have had a daughter.

But the Fairfield men are real. Suffrenes Castleman led some of the bloodiest if not the largest raids against the valley before the war was done, and the Empies came with him and came on their own behalf at least once. And Adam Dingman, who was a ranger for the patriotic party, made long scouts out of Fort Dayton through the northern woods.

There never has been a war quite like this border warfare in New York. Today I suppose we should call it a kind of total war; for the raids were aimed at the elimination of the civilian population of the valley: the raiders not only burned the government depots and destroyed the wheat and drove the cattle off, they even took pains to break up the farming tools. And though the raiding armies seldom numbered as many as a thousand men, the vastness and silence of the wilderness from which they struck left the settlers terribly without defence.

The Mounts went back to New Jersey and were not

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heard of again in our country; and I do not know what happened to the murderer, Cataroque. But Hess is presumed to have been killed by a woodsman named Nat Stoner not long after the ending of the war. J. Fennimore Cooper supposedly used this same Nat Foster as a model for his Leatherstocking, though neither Foster nor any other mortal man ever shot like the immortal Natty Bumppo of those tales.

This book is a story of how it may have happened in 1777 in Jerseyfield. That may seem far away in these days of airplanes and a war that covers thousands of miles. But there is still water in the creeks, the woods are just beyond, and here on my desk is a small brown tooth that came in the U.S. Mail, not long ago.

WALTER D. EDMONDS

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I. Gordon's Clearing

WAR, and rumor of war, had not disturbed the heading of the wheat. Not a blade moved in the field. The crop had attained its growth; the ripening was finished; and now the grain was ready for the sickle.

The wilderness imprisoned the clearing in a green silence. There was no cloud, no wind, not even a stirring of air. The water in Black Creek seemed sluggish; on the rift beside the mill its voice was muted. The conical hills upon the barren, black-moss uplands stood as still as graveyard stones against the sky.

The beginning of the Jerseyfield road to Snyder's Bush and Little Falls was molelike, a small round hole in the leaves, and quickly lost. The house stood a short gunshot from the road. It was a one-story, framed building, the walls sided with new boards that had been sawn the year before at the little mill. Behind the house was the log cabin it had supplanted. The cabin was now the barn, with stalls for two horses and a cow. A fenced yard pushed out beyond the barn

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as far as a two-acre piece of Indian corn, which in turn was bounded by the wheat field. Among the corn, beans and squash and pumpkins were growing in the Indian fashion. There was no garden.

This, on the first of August, 1777, was Robert Gordon's place. No living sign of man or beast was visible on it anywhere. It remained so all through the day, until the sun, swinging westward, cast slanting arrowlike shadows through the stems of wheat. By then the heat haze had moved down from the northern hills and the sun, shining through it, had taken shape. Way off in the woods a woodpecker started drilling on a tree.

The bird had been at work only a short time when another sound entered the silence from the north. This was the slow uncertain clank of a cowbell. But it steadily approached through the woods towards the ford over Black Creek that led to Mount's place. A nondescript brown cow, limp-eared, and amiable, dawdled into the open and down to the creek, to which she dropped her muzzle. A moment later two people followed her.

They were a boy and girl.

The boy carried a rifle, and as he came into the clearing, his brown eyes quickly searched it from end to end.

"They ain't home yet, Maggie," he said.

Maggie Gordon shaded her eyes, and shook her head.

"They'd have heard Brownie's bell."

"The barn door's shut," he said.

He had a thick brown thatch of hair that grew almost to his shirt collar. His grey homespun trousers were frayed

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to the knee, and his bare feet and ankles showed cuts and bruises. His trousers were held up loosely by a single thong over his left shoulder.

He turned his thin face to the girl.

"I'll wait around for a spell, Maggie. They ought to be back most any time."

"You needn't, Dick," she said lightly.

"I wouldn't like leaving you alone."

"I don't mind now. I never was afeard of anything, except those two Indians coming around. But they've gone now."

"Hess and Cataroque was all right, for Indians. They've taught me a lot of things. But Ma don't like them either. She says they smell too greasylike to suit her stomach."

"I'm glad they've gone. I never liked them. If they'd been friendly, they wouldn't have chased off to join the British."

"Shucks, Maggie, that don't mean anything. They told me any Indian showing up at Oswego would get a musket and a knife, and a copper kittle off the General there. You can't blame them for wanting a copper kittle."

He moved down from the bank and stopped beside the cow. The girl followed him. She also was barefoot, but her brown slim legs were smoother than the boy's. She wore a striped brown linsey petticoat that came halfway to her ankles, and a blouselike garment of blue calico called a short gown. She had opened it at the throat, during her hot walk home, so that the skin in the cleft showed startlingly white under her tanned throat.

"I wonder whether Dad and your Pa will get any news

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down there."

"Oh," he said with a slight start, "you mean the war."

"Yes, silly, what did you think I meant?"

"I hardly think about it."

"Why, Dick! Just yesterday you told me you wished you could go away and join the army."

"Well, I would, too. I'd like to get to be a drummer. They get better pay. Maybe I will go off this fall, when threshing's finished, if the war lasts."

"You couldn't join," she said. "You're too young. You're younger than I am."

"You needn't be so mighty, Maggie, just because you're a few days older than I be. I was sixteen last spring, and they're 'listing people sixteen years old. I'm big, too, for my age."

"You're most a man," she said with great gravity.

He turned suspiciously to look at her. She had put her forearms on the cow's back and was resting her chin upon them. Her grey eyes regarded him with huge solemnity, but the corners of the wide mouth, he saw, were twitching very slightly. The old cow, also, had lifted her head at him with bovine stolidity and a dribble from her muzzle into the smooth-sliding water in which all three were standing.

He jerked his head away again and did not speak.

The girl, however, did not shift her gaze, but studied him with a calm that slowly grew detached. The sunset took color in the sky and the creek began to reflect it, while shadows gathered under the western edge of woods.

The girl sighed, suddenly, and her voice was softer.



"Why, Dick! Just yesterday you told me you wished you could go away and join the army."

"Well, I would, too. I'd like to get to be a drummer. Maybe I will go off this fall, when threshing's finished."

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"Now, I've made you mad, Dick. I didn't mean to."

He did not wish to show too quickly that he was mollified. So he said, "You're always digging at me. I don't see why. Ain't it natural for a man to want to get ahead?"

"Why do you want to, so much?"

"You can't do anything up here, except work at the woods to make fields of it. Hoe corn, seed wheat, chop wood, and leach out ashes for money. We can't make much money, having to draw them so far. We can't do nothing here."

"Why, Dick, how can you say that, when you see everything our Dads have done? They cut the Jerseyfield road out, didn't they? And built Dad's sawmill and our houses. And now they're going for those millstones for your gristmill. Just think—we'll grind our own wheat this fall! That's more than they can say in Reeber's Settlement or Fairfield, and they're eight miles from Snyder's, and only ten from Little Falls. We're twenty miles," she said. "People are bound to settle where there's mills."

"You talk just like your Pa and mine."

"Why not?"

"Well, I want to get ahead. Just grinding flour ain't the whole wide world, Maggie. Your Pa's got some money. We ain't got anything."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"If I had some, I'd be as good as you."

"You're silly, Dick. What's that got to do with it?"

He swallowed and flushed.

"When I get some, when I come and ask you to marry me, then it will be all right."

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"Why, Dick," she said.

He flushed still darker. She had leaned forward on the cow's back. He wanted to look at her, but he couldn't seem to, now that he had said something after so much bothering of his mind.

"Dick," she said. "Look at me."

Reluctantly he turned his eyes to hers. She was gazing at him as if she had never properly seen him before. But she wasn't laughing at him.

He felt a quick bouncing of his heart as he thought maybe now she realized that he had grown up.

"Why, Dick. Since when have you been thinking that way?"

"Quite some time," he muttered. "A man can't hardly help what he thinks, with you so pretty."

It did him good to see the color rise in her cheeks, too. Facing so, they seemed almost angry at each other.

"But we couldn't marry, Dick," she said.

"I know it. Not till I get money."

"That hasn't anything to do with it, silly."

"I know. Not between you and me, Maggie." He felt quite bold. "But what would your Pa say?"

He nettled her with his persistence.

"No, no. I mean you're younger than I am, Dick. And I can't leave Dad. I've got to look after him since Ma died."

"I wouldn't mind if he wanted to live with us."

"Can't you listen?" She stamped her foot, forgetting where she stood, and splashed them all. "You're younger than I am. A girl doesn't marry that young."

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"Girls marry when they're fourteen, sometimes. You're growed enough."

"No, you. *You*, Dick. Don't you understand? When I do get married, I want to marry a man."

She had spoken in quick temper, but when she saw his dark flush, she realized all at once what she had said.

"Oh, Dick, I didn't mean to say it that way."

"You needn't say it at all."

"But, Dick. The trouble is, I never thought about it at all."

"Well, don't," he said. His face quivered so that she felt her heart bleed.

"I like you fine, Dick. You know that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "That's nice."

They stared across the cow, each conscious of how miserable the other looked, and both feeling much more miserable inside themselves. It was just then that the old cow decided she had had enough palaver on this business. She didn't enjoy going visiting to spend the night; she preferred her own barn. Without ado she walked out from under Maggie.

The girl lost her balance and the boy was barely in time to catch her from the water. For an instant he held her in his free arm, feeling sentimental again. But Maggie was enraged at her own ineptitude.

"Let go of me," she ordered. "Blame that cow!"

He let her go, walked behind her through the creek, and followed her up the farther bank.

"Hadn't you better start home?" she asked over her

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shoulder.

"I'll wait, awhile."

He sat on the doorsill, digging gloomy holes in the dirt with his bare toes, while she started laying the fire for supper. When she had the supawn cooking in its pot, she came to the door with a milk pail in her hand.

"Dick." Her voice was timidly entreating.

"Yes," he said without looking up.

"Can't we forget what we said? I guess I hardly ever thought about such things. I guess I'm just not ready to."

"All right." But he would not.

He stayed while she took the cow to the spring, where it was cool to milk. The ground sloped up sharply there, and the water issuing from between two stones, was led on a hollowed puncheon to a tub set in the ground. It made a steady trickling sound with its incredibly crystal thread of water; the flies seemed less insistent; the lengthening shadows crept in and quieted the cow; and the milk smelled strong and warm.

When Maggie returned to the house, Dick was still sitting in the door; but his face was turned towards the beginning of the Jerseyfield road. She also heard the creak of the loaded cart and the slow tread of both teams.

George Mount was jubilant. A great fat bear of a man, he leaned over the tailboard of the cart and patted the stones with thick hairy hands.

"Hello there, Maggie," he shouted when he saw her. "Come and take a look, will you?"

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She set the pail down and with Dick went over to the cart. Both men were dripping sweat from their hot journey, and the horses drooped their heads towards their wet-streaked knees.

Maggie glanced at her father.

"Hello, Dad." His grey hair was mussed and his face tired. He did not show his usual amusement at Mount's boyish enthusiasm. She could tell by his eyes that he was troubled. But to please Mr. Mount she looked over his shoulder at the stones.

"Just take a look. I'd rather look at them myself than if they was diamonds. They mean flour, girl. Look, Dick. They didn't shift a hair. Ain't a scratch on either. And I'm saying right now it was a hard trip, too."

Robert Gordon began to unhitch his team. "Did you make out all right, Maggie?" he asked in his quiet voice.

"Yes, Dad." Without turning, she was suddenly aware of Dick's watchful eyes. "I had a real nice visit."

"You can tell me about it tonight. I want to get the harness off the horses. They aren't the only thirsty ones either."

She took the hint and ran for a bucket and went to the spring. Dick was helping to unhitch. As she brought the water, she noticed that all three were talking. Their faces together made a contrast: her father's looking old and grey and filled with worry; Dick's excited, tense, with just a tinge of fear; George Mount's red and round, mouth open and running over with his hearty laugh. Mount was a laughing kind of man and brash in his opinions. His eyes

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were small and clever, with immoderate self-assurance that made him quick at small things. He would give what he called his honest-to-God ideas on any subject at the shortest notice.

"Who'll want to come this way?" he was saying. "Honest, Rob, sometimes you make me laugh."

Facing him, her father, slightly built and slow to think things through, seemed ineffectual; but Maggie thought that if it came to a downright pinch, she would rather have her father to depend on. He was touching the stones with fingers that were light and tentative upon the grooving, as if even now he were two thoughts behind the argument.

"Yes, George. It's surely fine to have them in—if we ever get a chance to use them."

George Mount's roving eye fell on her.

"Maggie," he shouted. "Come and listen to your Pa. He's all bothering himself about the war."

"Yes," she said, hurrying forward. She noticed that Dick was looking at her father, not at his, as if he put more stock in what Gordon had to say. "Did you get more news?"

"Yes, Maggie." Her father turned his head. "Burgoyne took Fort Ticonderoga on July fifth. He whipped St. Clair, and Schuyler's fallen back on the Hudson Valley. Burgoyne's threatening Albany."

He stopped. Mount cried, "That needn't worry us, Rob. You know that as well as me."

"Perhaps it needn't," Gordon said. "Here's what does. The Butlers and Johnsons are leading the army from Oswego that we learned about when those two Indians left

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here. They're down at Stanwix now, probably. Two thousand men. I saw Herkimer at the Falls. He say a thousand of them's Indians."

Dick broke in, "Then the Indians have broke the Albany treaty."

Gordon nodded.

"James Deane wrote Herkimer that the Indians are just invited along. But show me an Iroquois that can keep out of a fight he's watching. Herkimer's called the militia out. They muster day after tomorrow at Fort Dayton. There'll be a war as sure as shooting."

Maggie glanced at Dick and saw him pale and eager.

"I wish I was down there," he said.

"You'd wish you wasn't, if you was," George Mount laughed. "Once I caught up with you with my bull whip, you would." He turned to Maggie. "I been trying to tell your Pa we're too far north for anyone to bother us."

"For a regular army, yes. For Indians, no."

"They ain't bothered us yet, have they?"

"No, but this changes the whole war for us. It means that the Johnsons have brought in the Indians. If they win, they'll run the Mohawk Valley like wolves running sheep. If they lose, George, I tell you every tree will have an Indian in it."

"You're crazy!" George Mount said with an oath. "Are you trying to scare the girl or what? Every tree? Why there ain't two thousand Indians in the whole mess of the six nations. And the Oneidas are safe on our side."

"Are they?"

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"Dad," said Maggie. "Do you want to stay?"

She saw Dick look at her. Poor Dick, he's all mixed up, she thought. But Mount roared aloud.

"Stay? I'd hope so, Rob. Why, the war'll be over in a month. If it ain't, it's time enough to think of quitting. Either the British will put their foot in Albany or we'll hold them out till snowfall, and then they'll have to clear out. You can't manage an army from Canada, once the snow sets in. Any fool knows that much." He started laughing again. "Leastways, I'm telling you now, Rob."

Gordon said slowly, "I'd stay anyway till I got my wheat reaped."

"Sure, you stay that long. Tomorrow I'll come over for the stones. Dick and me can set them in. And in October we'll commence to grind. Come on, Dick."

Dick had unhitched the team. He forced himself to meet Maggie's eyes. His face got painfully red.

"Good-bye, Maggie."

She waved her hand cheerfully.

"Good-bye, Dick."

"What's the matter with Dick?" her father asked.

Maggie said, "I don't know." She didn't want to give him away. "I think he'd like to join the army."

"Dick's a good boy. Sometimes I think he's more of a man already than George is. But maybe it isn't just the army, Maggie. He's growing up and the way he looks to me, I think he's getting notions about you."

"Me, Dad?"

"Yes. Maybe he's falling in love with you."

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"That's silly. He's younger than I am. Besides, I have to look out for you. I don't want to marry."

He smiled.

"Don't you, Maggie? Well, come along. I want my supper. We've got to start reaping tomorrow and I'm tired."

They went in and sat down at the pine-board table, facing each other, and dipping their spoons in the common bowl. While they ate the evening gradually enclosed the hills, the woods, the clearing, barn and house, and the voice of the creek, rising over its bank, made a small sound outside the window sills.

Watching her father eat, methodically, not as if he had any taste for food, but as if he felt it was a duty to perform, Maggie saw how tired he was. She had never seen him look so old before. He was old to be her father, over sixty. Mrs. Mount had often discussed it with her—probably a love-match, late in life, for him. Maggie could not remember her mother at all. When she thought of her, it was through the possessions she had left; the white china teapot with the ivy leaves painted round it; the small looking glass over Maggie's bed in the loft; and the little calf-hide trunk that contained a wedding dress of white with violets printed on it, and lilac knots and laces to the sleeves and front.

Last year Maggie had put it on, for fun, and it had fitted her so well that she had run out into the barn to show herself to her father. "Hello," she had said, half-laughing and half-shy; and when he had turned with his eyes amazed, she had thrown her arms round his neck. As he started to

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kiss her, she had felt his body stiffen and he put her away and smiled at her. His face had been so hurt that she had managed to understand that at first he had mistaken her for her mother. She must be very like her mother, she thought, but she had no idea how much.

Her father was thinking so tonight as he looked across the table at her. The odd little manners with which she ate and put her spoon down and lifted her whole face to look across at him, puckering her forehead slightly—the same dark hair, grey eyes, wide mouth in the small face. She catechized him, too, much as her mother used to.

“Did you get me those two yards of sagathy?”

“No. I couldn’t get any of Ellice. I’m sorry. But he promised he would try from Mr. Paris down in Stone-arabia the next time he was down.”

“It doesn’t matter, Dad.”

“I got the flour, salt, and the balsam, and a pair of white-thread stockings.”

“Oh!” she cried. He nodded to his bundle. She pounced on it, opened it, and pulled them out.

“Kind of a birthday present,” he said. “But three months late.”

“Oh, Dad. They’re nice!”

He smiled.

She ran in to the shed, calling over her shoulder, “I’ll try them right on, but I must wash my feet first. Please get my shoes.”

He rose wearily and got the shoes from the loft. They were of black cloth with long red laces. She reached her

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hand through the shed door for them, then in a twinkling walked in with the gravity of a queen.

"You can't see them, half," she cried, and got a tallow dip and lit it at the fire. "Oh, Dad, they *are* nice." She lifted her petticoat nearly to the knee. "I ought to have my new petticoat on and the chintz short gown and my pocket to go with it. But I couldn't wait."

"They do fit nicely," he said.

She lifted serious eyes.

"I think lots of girls must have nicer legs than they ever know about, Dad, because they can't spend money to buy such fine stockings. Were they very expensive?"

"Not so very."

She leaned over and kissed his forehead softly. Poor Dick, she was thinking. He would be a long time making money enough to buy her any present like this.

"Well," her father said, "I got the other things, the horn-comb, the new kettle, the reel of thread you asked for, and two needles." Instantly she was burrowing.

"You couldn't get any tea?"

He said, "The price has gone too high since the war. Did you want it badly?"

"No. I didn't. But only today poor Mrs. Mount was saying how she fancied drinking real tea out of our china teapot. I think she takes a comfort in it. And I guess it does taste a little different, someway."

"Well," said Gordon, "it cost too much. But in that bag's a little present, too, you can share with her."

"What is it?" She was opening it, stockings forgot, sit-

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ting on the floor cross-legged like a little girl. "Oh!" she cried. "Loaf sugar. Two dozen lumps of it! Dad you hadn't ought to spend so much."

He said sombrely, "Perhaps it is extravagant. But the way things are, with prices rising, I don't know when we'll be able to buy things like that again. Even us. And I was thinking of Mrs. Mount, too. George is a good man, but he don't think of things."

"You always do, Dad."

He grumbled something and looked away.

"Do things look so bad, Dad?"

"Pretty bad, Maggie. It's the Indian business that worries me the most. The war's hardly meant anything to us so far. But once they're loose, we'll all feel war. You can't provide against them like an army."

He paused to stare through the window at his wheat field.

"We're out of the way here. But Herkimer said it was foolish for us to stay. Of course, George wouldn't listen to him. But George only listens to himself." Maggie sat still. A whippoorwill, late in the year to sing, began his calling somewhere out in the corn. They both noticed it, but did not mention it. "They're trying to gather people in that belong to the King's party. I hear they're going to send to Fairfield."

"What will they do to them?" Maggie asked.

"Send them down the valley, I guess. Near Albany they've been putting the men in jail. It's too bad. It's made

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the Scotch in Fairfield angry. I imagine they'll get out first."

"Get out, Dad?"

"Yes, to Canada."

"Isn't that a long ways?"

"Yes," he said. "But I'll be glad to have them gone. It's the worst part of this place, having them between us and the settlements."

"They wouldn't do anything to us, Dad, would they?"

"I don't know. I've never had any trouble with any of them. But George hates them."

"I know. Dick's afraid of them. He hates them, too."

"Down there," her father said, "everybody's afraid of everybody else. It doesn't matter who. The people at Reeber's Settlement are planning to leave, too. They say they'll go to Palatine."

She still had work to do, cleaning the dishes. She washed them in the shed in the light that came through from the kitchen door. Behind her back the clearing had darkened, bringing closer the steady calling of the whippoorwill.

The bird sang on and on in the cornpiece, making a small hollow in the dusty loam with the swelling of its breast. Beside the kitchen table she could see her father reading from a paper he had been given in Little Falls. He seemed a learned man to her, reading like that. Now and then he gave her bits of news: the army's in New Jersey; this has been a good season for lambing; the British King is trying

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to get 30,000 Russians to fight the colonies; the British tried to take Peekskill with a frigate and two sloops, but Col. Marinus Willett drove them out with eighty men; they put American prisoners on hulks of ships in New York and take the clothes off them. . . . It was a paper of the preceding spring. "Willett's with Col. Gansevoort at Stanwix," her father said. "He must be a good man."

The bird sang on. Maggie hardly heard her father's voice. There was no coolness yet to the night air; it was dark and close. She wondered what Dick would be doing at Mounts'. He had looked so miserable when he went away. She wished she had not said that thing about marrying a man. Dick was tall as a man. If he had on decent clothes, he wouldn't be bad-looking.

She could imagine the family crowded into the stuffy kitchen of the Mount house. It was not airy like their own, which had two glass windows. Mrs. Mount, she thought, would be uneasy over Mount's news. The three little boys would be playing bean game with the Negro boy. Mount had bought him once at a bargain, using the money Mrs. Mount wanted spent on cloth. Mount took pride in having a slave; it was the one thing the Gordons didn't have; but the boy was useless. They said he was fourteen, but he was no bigger than ten-year-old Henry. He was terribly skinny to look at, with black sticklike arms and legs to which flat hands and feet were swivel-jointed. The only thing he was good at was playing the bean game which the two Indians had taught the smaller boys.

Maggie shared Mrs. Mount's dislike of the Indians, even

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if they were pleasant to the children, but she did not exactly hate them. To her they seemed two poor and rather dirty brown men—in some ways not very different from Adam Dingman who trapped up the west Canada Creek some winters. But Indians had that queer sweetish smell that Mrs. Mount said sickened her.

Luckily they didn't often come to the Gordon place, but Maggie had seen them at Mounts', sitting solemnly on each side of the hearth, their shirts hanging round their middles, their hairless torsos shining with sweat. They would sit there, alternately eating, drinking rum, and smoking for two days on end, sometimes, until Mrs. Mount was almost rabid with distaste. She didn't dare to throw them out. But once when Mount came home, after a three-days' absence, she had the hysterics. Maggie was as glad as the older woman when Dick brought the news of their departure for the British fort.

The three younger boys were ten, nine, and seven. Henry, George, and Cobus. The first two looked like Dick, being wiry and shy; but Cobus took after his father. He didn't talk so much, perhaps, but he talked large when he did. It was almost comical to see him stand up, a small replica, with curly light brown hair and freckled face, fat and fully stomached, saying to his mother, "Gosh a'mighty, you're a scary woman."

The Mount house was always overflowed with wrangling, bickers, shouts, and great opinions. In the midst of it, the mother seemed a washed-out figure, pale and thin, her hair already white. She had saved four children out of nine, but

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even those that died, she once told Maggie bitterly, had all been boys. And she had hoped so for a girl.

By contrast, their own house seemed to Maggie such a peaceful place. She took real pleasure in its ordering. Work out-of-doors was burdensome, though her father often said she did a boy's share in it, but indoors she was happy. She had never been afraid of the woods, either, like Mrs. Mount, or of the long-day silence, when all men were away from home. Mrs. Mount said she was too young to feel it yet. She would in time.

Maggie did not believe it. She glanced at her father. Would Dick, suppose a girl should marry him, be quiet and kind like him? She did not know. Poor Dick. If only there had not been this war, things would have been so peaceful. It was the war, more than all the work he did, that tired her father so. They belonged to the right party; Gordon had no use for Kings and Parliaments; but, except for the Mounts, they seemed to be the only people north of Reeber's Settlement that did belong to it. . . .

2. *The Fairfield Men*

MAGGIE had finished her washing before she noticed with a sudden start that her father had stopped reading. The paper lay on his knees and his face was turned to the east window. For a few minutes she could not tell what was wrong. Nothing in the room, certainly. A few moths fluttered near the candle flame. Their shadows, large and vague, shifted noiselessly across the walls and ceiling. The sound of water flowing through the creek came in with articulate distinctness.

There was no other sound. The silence of the night was velvety, almost as if you felt it like a velvet cloth against your face. She shivered and quietly set down the empty pan. But even as she whispered the question, "What is it, Dad?" she knew what it was. The whippoorwill had stopped his singing.

"There must be something in the woods, Maggie," her father said quietly.

With a queer, quick sense of fright, Maggie saw his glance at the musket hanging with powder flask and bullet pouch

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from the deerhorns over the door.

She did not know why she should ask, "Shall I blow out the dip?"

He shook his head. Suddenly he put out his hand to touch hers, turned his face for a brief instant and smiled. He meant to calm her; but she felt the instinct of fear in his touch and her heart beat rapidly.

Outside the door the wheat field dimly showed its boundaries, like a spread of pewter-colored silk.

His hand tightened on hers. She heard it, too. A silver whistle in the woods.

"What's that?"

She was shivering now. After the thin silver note the woods resumed their quiet; but she knew that inside herself she would be afraid of the dark for a long time.

Her father said, quietly, "Some men are coming."

They issued from the woods, one by one, halting on the edge of the clearing, moving together into a single darker blot in the night. A voice roared out among them: "Gordon! Robert Gordon! Are you home?"

"It's the Fairfield men," said Gordon. "I thought they might come this way." He stepped to the door where they might see him. "Who are you?" he shouted.

The same voice answered: "It's Casselman. We're only stopping."

One after another men emerged from the dark blot and came at a quick pace forward along the wagon track. As she joined her father at the door, Maggie saw their in-

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dividual shapes, black against the grain, with rifles on their shoulders.

The men crowded into the house. They stood round the walls, leaning on their guns, and looked curiously at Gordon and his daughter.

The kitchen was not large enough for them all. Maggie could see a few of them still beyond the door, faintly, in the candle glow, their leggings strapped at the knee, the dim shine of their rifle barrels. They were quiet, listening.

In the room the air thickened with their sweat smell. She began to feel that she and her father were being hemmed in. Suffrenes Casselman was sitting down. He said, "Those Dutch are sending up a patrol to herd us in to one of their confounded forts." As his head turned and he looked at Maggie, the light fell blankly across the surface of his eyes. "So this is your girl, Gordon."

Her father was standing at the end of the table. When he spoke, she realized that he did not like Casselman.

"Maggie's a decent girl," he said shortly. "You're making a long march."

"We're going to Stanwix. St. Ledger's there now, if he hain't put Gansevoort out already." Casselman's voice was flat. "The women have started north."

"North?" echoed Gordon.

"Yes. We sent them with some of the old men. They've got an Indian guide. My pop's with them. He used to know the trails in '57. They've struck across the Canadas; they'll

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hit Black River. The Indian called it Ka-hu-ah'-go. Go down it to the lake and strike along for Oswego."

"They went through Mount's?"

"Sure. We saw them past Reeber's Settlement and left them just below here. They hit the woods. We're bending south now. For Stanwix."

Her father said, "There'll be a fight at Stanwix."

Casselman gently patted the table.

"I hope there is." His voice was vibrant and low. "For two years we've been putting up with these here German farmers and their blasted committees."

"They aren't all Germans," Gordon said.

"They might as well be," said Casselman. "But I've got less use for Campbells and Clydes, turning against their own people. Who made this country anyway? Men like Johnson, and the British Army. Who's trying to grab the gravy now? The Patriot's Party, they're calling themselves. All they're after is the land. Profiteers of the French wars and now they've lost all their money and they want to sink the Johnsons and get an unlawful share of their estates. Congress! Committees!" He made a bitter oath.

A bit of laughter floated out of somewhere like a moth and then the silence fell. Casselman stared round with predatory eyes. His nose was hooked like a bird's.

He asked, "What's funny?"

"Ask Gordon," a young man said harshly. Maggie looked at him. He was someone she had seen before, named Empie. His eyes protruded slightly. They seemed to absorb the light. He looked like his brothers, otherwise, tall, active,

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quick, with a good nose and strong, thin mouth. He shaped his mouth now, "I seen him at the falls two days ago, visiting with Herkimer, the son . . ."

"Whatever you think, you'd better hold your tongue," Gordon said. A thin flush had risen in his cheeks, but he looked frail and small in the candlelight.

"Who the devil do you think you are?" demanded Casselman, turning on the man.

Will Empie laughed easily, glancing Maggie's way.

"You aren't no brigadier, Suffrenes."

"I don't have to be to handle you," said Casselman. He swung back to Gordon. "Which party are you going with?"

"I'm staying here," said Gordon.

"Sure. I don't care where you stay. I've got to know what friendly houses we have in this district. Butler's orders. And mind you, Gordon, this is my last chance to find out."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Listen," said Casselman. "In five days we'll sweep this country from Stanwix to Albany."

Gordon leaned a little towards him.

"That's a threat."

"All right. Have it your own way. I've given you warning."

"What difference does it make which way I stand?"

Casselman looked puzzled.

"I don't know," he said. "I never had no trouble with you folks up here."

"Nobody knows anything," said one of his men. Several of the others thought that that was funny. Maggie found

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Casselman's expressionless eyes watching her.

"Gordon. This is no place to leave a girl when the Indians get loose."

"I know that myself," her father said. "I heard Sillinger has offered eight dollars for every piece of hair."

"What if he has? Congress has tried the same business." Casselman swung back to him. "Listen, man. You're just as British as I am. You wouldn't take orders from some German fool, just because he pulled a vote in some committee, would you? They haven't even got a flag!"

"I never did see what right they had to the Mohawk flats," somebody said.

"They won't have it long," said Casselman. "How about Mount?"

"You'd better ask him," Gordon answered.

"No sense in you getting tarty now."

The lack of progress in the conversation disquieted Maggie. The men round the door had crowded closer, so that now she could see their faces and the sweat-soaked shoulders of their linen hunting shirts. She could tell by the way his underlip had drawn in that her father's temper was worn thin. He was looking down his nose at Casselman and Casselman had lifted his face, thrust far out from his neck, like a hawk's.

Then a cool voice broke in, "Say, Mister Gordon. Can we get a drink of water?"

Immediately the tension broke.

"I've always heard you had a real good spring, Gordon."

Casselman had lowered his eyes.

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"It's fine soft water," Gorden said quietly. "It never runs dry."

"Not even this year? I'd rather have a spring like that than ten pounds English money in my pocket."

Maggie could have laughed. She spoke up from the corner where she stood. Her voice was fresh and light, and the faces all turned to her.

"Just a minute. I'll draw you two fresh buckets."

She stepped back through the door to the shed, and groped for the buckets in the darkness. It was incredibly cool and sweet there after the sweat-reek in the kitchen and she stopped to draw deep breaths of it. Behind her the voices started swimming back and forth across the candle-light. Outside, she was aware of the whippoorwill tentatively feeling out his song.

As she went out of the shed with the buckets, she bumped into a man. She could not see him. But she felt the cold touch of his rifle barrel.

"Don't be scared," he said. "I didn't mean to hit you with the gun. I just wondered if I could give you a hand, maybe." She thought it was the same voice that had asked for water.

She tried to make him out, but she could see no more than his vague shape against the night.

"I don't know who you are," she said.

"Do you have to know a man's name to let him carry a bucket for you?" he asked, laughing a little. The laughter relieved her; it sounded natural; but at the same time it

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made her shy. She stood before him with a bucket hanging from each hand and said in a small proper voice, "My name is Margaret Gordon."

"My name is David Murray, Mistress Gordon."

She was aware that he had taken off his hat. In all her life no man had bared his head to her or called her *Mistress*. She wished she could see his face; then she was glad that the darkness hid her own. She had a sense of her own ineptitude. He didn't talk like the other men. Maybe, she thought, he was one of the high gentry from Caughnawaga way, cousin of Butlers or Johnsons.

"We're introduced," he said gravely. "Can I help you with the buckets, now?"

"Oh yes. If you want to."

"What do you think I asked for water for?" he asked.

She hadn't anything to answer that with. Besides, his hands were feeling for the buckets. His fingers touched her bare arm and slid down it to the wrist, and caught the bucket-bail. She felt herself flush up at the touch and was doubly glad of the darkness now. "He can't see me," she said to herself. "Out here I'm good as any fine girl friend he has."

"Here's the other one, Mr. Murray."

The buckets struck together.

"You better go ahead," he said.

"You'll have to follow me close. The path ain't straight."

"But I can't see you any."

"You'd better let me take them, then, Mister Murray."

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"I won't. And look here. Nobody calls me Mister Murray."

"Esquire Murray?" she asked, with mingled curiosity and a sense of her own simplicity.

He laughed.

"Not hardly. Just David. Why don't you call me that?"

"But I couldn't and you call me Mistress Gordon."

"That's not hard. I'll call you Maggie. It's a prettier name than David, anyway."

She said seriously, "David's a fine name, I think."

"Lots of men have good names, Maggie. But there ain't every girl that's got a pretty face and name together."

He stumbled suddenly, crashing the buckets together. And Maggie recovered her breath, and asked, "Did you hurt yourself?"

"I'm blind as a bat," he said. "Who made this path?"

"Me," she said. "But I know it all right."

"Well, I can't see it at all. I can't see you except your short gown, and that hardly at all either. How far is this spring?"

"We're halfway there. But it's kind of stony from now on."

"Then I guess you'd better lead me."

"Why don't you let me have the buckets?"

"I'll break my neck first."

"Then I guess you'd better take my hand," she said.

She heard him set one bucket in the other, and again they fumbled in the dark.

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His hand took hers in a firm grasp; as his fingers closed on hers she thought with surprise that she had never taken Dick's hand, though Dick wanted to marry her. She wondered what he would say if he could see her walking hand in hand with a soldier. The path was hardly wide enough for two to walk abreast; the man's shoulder touched hers and the stock of the rifle bumped against her back. She had to lead him as she would a blind man, saying, "Mind this stone." "Here you step over the water." And finally, "Here's the spring."

The half-barrel set in the ground confined the reflection of a star.

Murray let the buckets drop, set down his rifle, and kneeled at the edge. "Your father's right, Maggie," he said, after a moment. "It's cold, sweet water."

"It's a good spring and generally allowed so," she said with a touch of primness.

"I'm sorry!" he exclaimed. "I was so thirsty I forgot. Do you want a drink?"

Though Maggie had not been thirsty, she found it pleasant to have him fill a bucket and hold it up for her. A clumsy business, and she was splashed and her cheek wet. She laughed at his contrition, insisting that she was not wet at all, or only a drop.

"But you'd better let me carry the buckets back or you'll be sure to spill out half."

"Maybe you better," he admitted; but he still held onto the buckets. "It's quiet here, away from that houseful."

"But they're thirsty," she said. "They're waiting for us."

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"They're no special friends of mine," he said. "Waiting a while won't hurt them."

Her breath came a little faster. From where they stood, up the slope from the valley, they could look down towards the lighted window on their side of the house. Twelve small panes of glass, and the back of a man filling them, the shadow of his head drawn out across the wheat. At the corner of the house another man leaned with his gun cradled in his arm. He wore a cap with a coontail hanging over his right ear. His head was lifted towards the east.

"Looking for the moon, I guess," said Murray. "Suffrenes says we have to start when it comes up."

Maggie did not speak. All at once, it seemed to her that she was detached from the house; as if she looked down on an invaded place, where the men had come in; where she herself was still standing behind her father, staring into their staring eyes. She made a motion to start back, but Murray said, "I hate to go."

"You mean you wish you were in our party?"

"Oh no. Just to go. We'll lose our reaping this year. I never liked reaping before. It's funny. Now I'm missing it."

She said gravely, "That's why Dad wants to stay here. To reap his wheat." Her forehead puckered, though he could not see it. "Dad says it isn't just cutting down with a sickle. It's finishing the work you started when you began to cut the land off with your brush-sith."

"I guess it is. But I had to come along, just the same."

"Why?"

"Dad went with Colonel Butler two years ago last spring.

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We had a message from him that John or I should come. We drew straws for it. The other was to stay and play the other party so we could hold our land. But Suffrenes said they were putting people into prison down the river. They've even got Mrs. Butler now; I think they've moved her down to Albany. Suffrenes said mother and the youngsters would have to come along. It's a hard trip. John went with them."

"It is a hard thing," Maggie said softly. "What did you do with your house?"

"We put boards on the windows. I guess it won't do much good. We heard the rebels would probably cut our wheat. What we haven't cut already. It ripens earlier down there. We buried the silver spoons Ma had when she was wedded. We buried what we could and turned out the dry cows. Maybe they'll be all right. John took the horses along." He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "But Suffrenes says we'll be back down the valley in a week. All the Canada business meant nothing. Up there, once the real troops came in, the rebels ran like rats. You'll see how this Dutch militia pulls its feet. . . . I'm sorry. I forget you're the other party. It's too bad."

She had forgotten all about that: she felt so sorry for him.

"You aren't scared?" she asked.

"No. I guess not." He handed her the water. Her back straightened against the pull of the laden buckets, and she turned for the house.

Even in the darkness, he noticed how free her walk was.

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"It's funny," he said, "I never heard about you before."

She flushed. She could hear him walking close behind in the darkness. As if he had forgotten everything, he began to hum a little tune.

"What's that?" she asked. "It's pretty."

"It's just a song."

"I never heard it. Won't you sing it for me?"

His voice was light and true and he sang the song softly as they went slowly towards the house.

"'Twixt the water and the willow tree,
There stood I,
When I spied my gallant gentleman
Riding by,
And he looked to me so gaily on his
Horse so high,
With his golden hair a-curling and his
Feather in the sky."

"Is that all?"

"No. It kind of suits, though. I hadn't thought."

"Oh, would a pretty lady give a
Guerdon gay
To the comfort of a soldier on his
Lonely way?
Yea, though he died tomorrow in the
Foremost fray,
I would never love another, not till
Judgement day."

"It is pretty," said Maggie. "Did she never love another?"

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"I don't know."

"She sounded as if she meant it," Maggie said softly.

"You think she did? But you see, according to how the song goes, he wasn't so nice."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. He just wasn't. You have to take a song's say-so, don't you?"

"I wonder . . ."

"What do you wonder?"

Maggie was bold.

"What color your hair is."

His voice was half-comic, half-serious, coming over her shoulder.

"Plain mouse-brown, if you want to know. It doesn't curl, either. It's cut short so I won't get ticks when I'm in the woods."

"Oh."

"But I'm not like him. I stopped to draw water with you."

"Oh, is there more?"

"One verse."

"Please sing it."

She noticed that the whippoorwill had hushed again.

"The night is falling, bitterly the

Lone birds cry,

'Twixt the water and the willow he has

Passed me by,

With his gay and gallant feather, on his

Horse so high.

He would not say a word to me—so

What could I?"

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Maggie had stopped to let him finish the song. She sighed. "I feel sorry for her," she whispered, overwhelmed by a pity for women. She felt Murray close behind her.

"Do you, Maggie?"

His hand was on her shoulder. She turned her head. He put his arms round her shoulders and kissed her.

She stood stock still, and he said nothing for a moment after he had let her go. Then, with the inconsequentiality of all whippoorwills, the bird in the cornfield took up its song in a full tide of voice.

Maggie opened her eyes. "What could I?" she was thinking. She could see his shape, dimly, standing against her. He looked tall. It was a strange thing. She still held the buckets.

"You were wonderful," he said. There was something in his voice.

"Oh."

"You didn't spill a drop."

"Oh," she said again.

Then all at once she understood that he was laughing. Without a word she turned to the shed door.

"Don't go," he whispered. "Please."

She did not stop until she was safely inside the shed. But there she had to wait a moment, to try to down her color. She felt ashamed because she had liked it; and she felt ashamed because she thought she must have acted queerly to him. No doubt he had kissed girls in plenty before her. But she did not know. Did he expect her to drop the buckets,

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or what in the world could he have expected her to do? And she didn't even know what he looked like.

Inside the kitchen the men were still talking round the walls. But her father was silent, and Casselman was watching his own finger as it tapped the table. He glanced up at her entrance and thanked her. "We won't trouble you long. We're just waiting till moonrise."

Maggie put dippers in the buckets and the men drank eagerly.

"Don't drink too much," Casselman cautioned them. "We've a long way to go and I don't want you sloshing like a bunch of churns."

Taking the second bucket through the front door for the men outside, she set it on the sill and leaned against the wall to watch them drink. She knew a few of them by sight, from passing Fairfield. Henry Davis, John McCaffery who was six foot six, and the three Ames brothers. They thanked her, except for Lame Hans. He had been born with a twisted foot and was a surly sort of man. The others were all strangers.

Now that her heart beat easier, she tried to see which one could have been Murray. At least it couldn't be the man with the beard whose leggings smelled of stable manure. He had said his hair was mouse brown.

They did not talk much now; they kept watching the woods to the east of the clearing. When Casselman came to the door they made way for him.

He leaned for a moment on his gun, a looming figure,

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with broad, stooped shoulders and his small head outthrust. "Well, boys, she's about due." His voice wasn't threatening any more. He looked as if he had put politics out of his mind and was thinking plain facts about their march.

A faint light began in the east, netted in the leaves of a high birch.

"She'll be up in ten minutes," a man said.

"There's not much light in her."

"Enough," said Casselman.

They were all outside the house, watching the sky. Maggie thought that most of them seemed young. A sense almost of pity invaded her, to think of them, marching all night in the shadow of the woods. They looked like a little band now, not the throng that had first crowded into the kitchen.

"Gordon," said Casselman, "I'd advise you to clear out. We've took your powder, but it's no more than the militia have done to us all over the valley." He paused. "If you'll come over to our side, I'll give half of it back."

He waited a moment for Gordon to answer. Maggie glanced quickly at her father. She understood the set look on his face now.

"Well," said Casselman, "you're a fool, but you're honest. And we ain't putting you in jail." His head turned slowly as his eyes went over the clearing. "You've got a nice place here. It would be too bad to see it burnt."

"You'll burn it?"

"We'll burn out every rat in Tryon County, before we're done."

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"Beginning with Reeber's," one of the men added.

Gordon was silent. He stood in the doorway at Casselman's shoulder. Just outside the door was a young man Maggie had not noticed before. He was looking at her, while all the others waited for the moon; he had his hat in his hand. Mouse-brown, he had said his hair was. It was newly cut, and not well cut—as if a mother or sister had taken the shears to him in a hurry.

"It's not mouse-brown," she thought. "It's a good color."

His eyes avoided hers, now that she had discovered him. He had not seemed bashful at the spring. Maybe he was shy in the company of the other men. Maybe it was not the same man at all.

Two days, three days from now, whenever it was, there would be fighting in the woods round Fort Stanwix. He might be shot, they might all be shot, and she never see him again. And she would have liked to know.

"She's up," said Casselman. "Come on."

A few said good-bye, but most went silently. The young man was the last to go. As he passed her she heard him humming,

"Oh, would a pretty lady, give a
Guerdon gay
To the comfort of a soldier . . ."

The whippoorwill sang again, in the cornfield, and the men dropped into file behind Casselman. The moon found threads of silver on their rifle barrels. Only a few talked at all.

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Gordon stood still in the door, and Maggie kept her place against the wall. For several minutes, father and daughter stared westward, until the sound of footsteps had faded away, the last shape had been swallowed in the night, the last voice hushed.

Maggie gave a little sigh.

"Did they take all our powder, Dad?"

He nodded.

"Casselman asked for it. There wasn't sense in trying to keep them from getting it. They're all of them feeling mean about their families going off to Canada."

His face was drawn.

He did not start, as Maggie did, when a step came down along the road.

"Dick!" she exclaimed.

Dick was bareheaded. He carried his squirrel gun.

"You all right, Maggie?"

"Why yes, Dick. Why?"

"There's a whole parcel of people camped down below us on our creek. We seen their fires and I went down. They were mostly women. Some little children and about six men, all of them old but one. I listened to them talking. One of the little babies was sick, I think. And I found out, listening, that they was the women of the Fairfield people and that the men had mostly come this way. When I got down here, I seen them all around your house."

"They didn't do anything but take our powder, Dick."

"Gee, Mr. Gordon! All of it?"

Gordon nodded. "They were nice enough about it. They

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said they'd give me back half if I joined their party."

Dick glanced up under his thatch of hair.

"You didn't say so?"

"I can't change opinions for a pound of gunpowder, Dick."

Gordon looked at him for a moment before turning into the house. The quiet of the night came in for a moment to the very door.

"Well, they've gone," Maggie said. She couldn't help comparing him, in her mind's eye, to David Murray. Poor Dick, he looked like some wild woods animal, standing that way, with his ragged hair, and his brown eyes quick in the candlelight.

"Does your Dad know you're over here?"

"I guess not, Maggie. He'd be mad, most likely." He flushed painfully. "But I had to come over and see you were all right."

His face looked up to her so earnestly that she said, with a little rush of warmth:

"That was nice of you, Dick."

She would have liked to see him in a decent set of clothes, with his hair cut neatly. It made her realize that she didn't know at all what Dick was, actually. And she felt curious. Even when he said, "Aw shucks," and shifted his bare feet.

But he had his own curiosity.

"Did any of them bother you, Maggie?"

"Me? What do you mean, Dick?"

"Pa says that some of those highlanders will raise hob, once they're loose." He looked away. "I didn't know."

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"Oh, no," she said. "They were all right."

Poor Dick.

He asked, "What'll your Pa do now? Will he stay?"

"I guess he will, until the wheat's in."

"I'll be watching you," he said.

She smiled at him. Poor Dick, again. What could he do with his squirrel rifle? He was like a small boy, even the way he thought of things. But he looked so wistful to her, so helpless somehow in his promise to look after her, that she stepped down to him.

"I'm awful grateful to you, Dick," she said softly, and put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

He was too surprised to move. To see him so almost made her laugh. This afternoon he'd talked of being a man, and now even his ears were red. Then with annoyed humiliation it occurred to her that she must have seemed exactly like that to the Fairfield man.

They stared at each other like two young dogs, stiff to the tips of their toes.

"Maggie," he said. But he didn't know what else to say. She recovered herself first.

"You'd better get back home, hadn't you? Before your Dad finds out you've been away."

"I guess so, maybe."

He cradled the squirrel gun in his arm and turned away. But beyond the feeble zone of light he halted. She heard a thickness in his voice out in the darkness.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night," she answered.

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She waited till he must have reached the ford.

Then she heard his voice a little stronger.

"I'll be around again," he called.

She did not answer, but an instant after went in and closed the door. She still felt sorry for Dick.



3. *Adam Dingman*

THREE days after the departure of the Fairfield men, Dick Mount turned up at Gordon's house. He wandered into the kitchen, and, finding nobody at home, walked out again.

The same still heat that they had had for so many weeks persisted. Looking across the clearing, he could at first see no sign of Gordon or his daughter. But he saw where they had been reaping.

The stubble made a narrow border to the standing grain. Here and there the sheaves stood up neatly shocked on the ends of their morning shadows. Maggie was a first-rate binder, she enjoyed twisting the straw, and her shocks stood up securely. But as he walked through the stubble, Dick noticed that the sickle had made uneven slices in the grain, as if the hand wielding it continuously faltered. It also seemed to him that, supposing Gordon mowed every day, he had very little to show for his work. By now three acres should be down and bound.

He went quietly down the field to the far corner, and

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there, glancing through the heads of grain, he found Maggie as well as her father reaping. Both of them were unaware of his approach.

They worked bent over from the hips, their backs below the kernels, their left arms crooked like cradles to receive the falling wheat. The blades of their sickles made dry shearing sounds through the straw.

He had never seen Maggie reaping before. He knew that her father did not like her to do heavy field work. But when he glanced at Gordon, he understood why she was working.

Already his face was dripping wet; but it had a grey tinge under its burn. The swing of his right arm was slow, as if he had grown tired by his first hour's labor; and he took each forward step deliberately. He seemed to be trying each foot before he set it down.

"There's something the matter with him," Dick thought. "He don't look well."

He turned his eyes towards Maggie again. She had pinned up her old grey petticoat to the level of her knees. Her brown legs were filmed with the dry dust that puffed up at every footstep. She wore an old short gown in which the pattern had faded to a sort of silver grey. It clung tight across her back and shoulders, showing their suppleness, and hung down loosely in front, where it was opened to let what air there was cool her throat.

Something in the posture, in the way her left arm caught and cradled the falling grain, as if she had an impulse to hold it to her breast, stirred the boy. His thin brown face grew sad. He set the stock of his squirrel gun in the dust

ahead of his feet and leaned on the barrel, watching her. He had never watched her when she was completely unaware of his presence.

Doing so now, he could see little things about her. Not only the lithe way her body was put together, nor the manner in which she bent to the work, almost graciously, but little things that made for tenderness. His practiced eye quickly noticed that she could have worked away from her father twice as fast as the old man moved. But she did not. She held her head, round which she had coiled her braids to keep them out of her way, bent a little sidewise, so that she could see what he was doing without openly appearing to watch; and whenever he fell behind she slowed her own pace to suit his.

Gordon was working like a man in a stupor, who did not feel or see a thing beyond the motion of his hands. But when a blue jay suddenly became raucous in the woods down the creek, his hand halted at the beginning of a stroke, shook slightly, with a glitter of brilliance on the clean edge of the sickle. Then he straightened his back painfully and stared in the direction of the bird.

Dick felt at once that Gordon was uneasy. He could see that in the stiffening of the man's neck. But he saw also the slow stubborn setting of the underlip. It seemed to stick against his teeth. Evidently he found it difficult to smile and say to Maggie, "Jays are noisy birds, always hollering about nothing."

She had lifted her head at the bird's voice, with the wild quick gravity of a young doe, but she watched her father

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instead of the woods; and Dick saw her forehead pucker and the black brows lift slightly.

"Yes," she said, "they make a lot of noise."

Her father was not breathing as a tired man should. His breath came rapid and short. But he said, "We're getting along. If we can mow a little more than an acre every day, we'll be ready to move ten days from now. I'd like to thresh it, though. It would bring us better than fifty dollars, Maggie."

"We've got time enough." She spoke calmly. "Wouldn't you like some water from the spring?"

"Yes I would." He was mopping his forehead with his arm. "It's not the work makes me feel bad. It's the heat. I never knew it to stay hot so long."

But he seemed to be unwilling to stop even for the few moments it would take her to walk to the spring and back. "I'll just finish out my swath," he said.

"No, Dad, you sit down in the shade."

"I'll sit down when you bring the water, Maggie."

"But look at all we've got done already today," she said encouragingly, and they looked back together and saw Dick there.

"Morning, Mr. Gordon," he said. "Hello, Maggie."

Her color had deepened as though she wondered how long he had been standing behind them.

Gordon said, "Good morning, Dick. How are things over your way?"

"All right. Except for Ma. She's acting uneasy lately, all the time. Pa sent me over to see if you'd heard of anything."

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"There hasn't been a soul," said Gordon.

"That's what Pa thought. He thought it might make Ma easier though."

He still leaned on his gun, meeting Maggie's glance with diffidence.

"We were just quitting a minute, Dick," she said. "I want to get some water."

"I'll go along," he said.

"Yes. That's right," said Gordon. "You go along." He bent down painfully, sickle in hand.

Maggie and Dick walked a little way in silence, watching each other sidelong.

"Did you get licked t'other night?" she asked curiously.

"No," he said. "Pa was out himself, looking around. He wanted to know what was going on over here."

"What did he say?"

"He said he guessed Casselman was scared to start anything yet."

"Does he know you're over here now?" she asked. "Really?"

"Well," he said, "I guess he does. He's reaping today. We got the stones set into the mill yesterday. I told him I was coming over here and he said I wasn't to come till I got done with my half acre."

"Did you get done?"

"Me? No, I didn't."

"He'll be awful mad at you."

"Maybe he will. He keeps telling me all the time how he's got two years legal title to me yet." He scuffed his

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bare feet as he walked. "I figured I had to find out how you was coming on. After that night."

The color deepened in her cheeks, covered her throat. She blushed even behind her ears. He saw that from the corner of his eye. And when she found her voice it was uncertain.

"Dick. It don't always mean anything when a girl kisses a boy, does it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, anything particular. I—I didn't mean it that way anyway."

He cleared his throat and scuffed some more sand with his feet.

"Shucks," he said. "I didn't take it that way. Not after what you said in the crick."

She turned her face to him with a pathetic kind of earnestness.

"Dick, did you notice Dad?"

"Yes."

"Did he seem queer to you?"

"He looked kind of sick to me."

"I think he is."

"What's he got? It's early for ague."

"It doesn't act like ague," she said. "I think he's awfully worried, but that wouldn't make him sick. I don't know what it is."

"He hadn't ought to work out there if he's sick."

"I know it, Dick. But I can't stop it. I tried to yesterday. He told me to hush my mouth, if I didn't want it slapped."

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"He did?" Dick demanded indignantly.

"He doesn't know what he's saying. He's never hit me. He just didn't want me to help reap, not the first two days. But he said I could this morning. He seems to be possessed about that wheat."

"You hadn't ought to be working there."

"I don't mind it."

"You will by night, Maggie. It's the hardest work there is."

"I wouldn't dare leave him there alone."

"Well," he said, "I guess you'll have to help him then. If my Pa didn't keep me tied up so tight at home, I'd help you some. Maybe I could sneak away a while tomorrow."

"Thanks, Dick. But I guess we can get on all right. I wish we had some powder, though. We're out of pork. That's what troubles Dad the most."

"Why didn't you say so? I'll just step out and pick you up one with my gun. Where do they mostly run now?"

"There ought to be some up the beech ridge," she said. "If it wouldn't take too long and make your Pa too mad. I wouldn't want you to take a licking for helping us."

"If I'm going to, I might as well get licked for half an hour extra."

In the daytime it could be seen that the sunk half-barrel into which the spring trickled was lined with soft green water moss. The water had a blue-green, deep-sea look, until one had it in a glass, and then, like a miracle, it was crystal.

Dick watched Maggie dip the bucket and lift it out. He

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didn't offer to help or to carry it back to the field. That was a woman's natural job. She didn't expect it.

She stayed with him a moment, her body slanting against the weight of the bucket, her free hand on her hip. With her blouse open and her hair about her head, her neck rose slender and free. The bones showed in her thin square shoulders. She made Dick think of a deer again. He remembered some girls he had once seen in Little Falls, going to a wedding the miller said, all in their best chintz clothes, complete with shawls and pockets. But it didn't seem to him that they compared to Maggie. And all these years he'd never noticed.

Her eyes seemed to come out of nowhere and see him again and she smiled at him. A person couldn't help loving her for her smile. It had a hesitant, half-shy beginning, but a wide and whole-souled finish.

"You do look serious enough to go to war yourself, Dick; not just to shoot a hog."

"I wasn't thinking of that," he said. "Do you want a big one?"

"No, get us a this year's one, if you can, well-grown. There's no sense in eating roasting pig now. But not too big." Her forehead puckered again. "I'll have to let the knuckles go to waste. Maybe I won't have time to try the lard out, either. And it's too early to salt the sides."

He nodded.

"It won't keep long."

"No. But I've got my flannel bags out in the shed to hang it in."

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She turned away and he started straight into the woods to hunt the pigs.

Like all other settlers, Gordon let his pigs run wild. Even in winter they were left out on the back-bush farms, where there were neither threshing nor fold-yards to house them, nor food to give them if there had been yards. A settler brought a sow that had been bred and turned her into the woods. Herself and nature managed the rest.

Dick headed south, up the slope from the Black Creek valley, towards the hardwood ridges. He half-hoped to spot a deer, but since the heat the deer had mostly gone back up the Canada Creek towards the mountains. At the crest of the first rise was a balsam swamp with sumach round the edges and and moose maple and witch hobble. Beyond, the ridge rose up like a hog's back in shape and in the color of its brush-free carpet of dead leaves. He stopped at the foot of it a moment, staring upwards, but he saw no sign of any pig, beyond the last night's droppings.

Considering the drought and heat, it seemed more likely that they would be wallowing in the swamp, so he began to circle quietly along the edge, and suddenly, in a small clearing, he caught a fresh scent of them and, walking cautiously forward, found a litter with an old sow.

It must have been an early litter, for the young ones were half-grown, about the size that Maggie wanted. The old sow lay shoulder deep in her wallow, her small eyes unblinkingly looking his way. At his next move she grunted, jerked her shoulders out and left the muck with a long suck-

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ing sound in one swift rush. Her litter floundered up and squealed and then went bucketing in her wake. But the last one gave Dick a fair mark. He aimed behind the ear and fired.

The pig spun over on its side and rolled half a dozen feet and then lay still. He went over to it, cut a stick and split the hind legs, yanked the pig up onto a stub of a broken spruce branch, bled, and dressed it.

When he was all through with the work, he looked round for some ferns to wipe his hands.

"Well, youngster, what'll it weigh?"

Dick whirled on his heels. Afterwards he couldn't think just what he had expected to see, but what he did see was a smallish, thickset man in a dull green hunting shirt of home-wove linen and deerskin Indian leggings. His bold blue eyes looked humorously at the boy from under the narrow brim of his hat; his heavy square red face was set sardonically, the thin upper lip drawn down upon the lower.

"Adam!" said Dick.

"Hello, Dick."

"What you doing here?"

"Herkimer has me running a scout north of Dayton. Orders to go clear to Gordon's and see if there's anyone moving in from westward." He pursed his lips to spit a snuff-stained squirt. "I just come out on the ridge when I heard your gun go off, so I walked down this way. I thought I'd kill an Injun maybe. But I found you with your face inside the inwards of a hog and your gun twenty foot off against a tree."

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Dick looked ashamed.

"Boys will be boys," said Adam. "I expect you're doing it for Maggie Gordon, ain't you?" As Dick nodded, the man stepped across to the squirrel gun and glanced at it. "Hain't even loaded." He handed it to Dick. "Now, son," he said, "you listen to me. Maybe nothing's happening in North America. Or then again maybe there's one or two people having words. You can't tell. But the first thing you want to learn after making a shot is to set still where you let the gun off, load it, and then look around." He sighed. "I could have walked right down here and lifted your hair if I was taking pay from Sillinger. I could have got eight dollars for it without even laying out the powder for one shot."

Dick blushed furiously. "I'll remember after this," he mumbled.

"Good idee. But what's the matter with Gordon, he ain't killing his own hogs?"

Briefly Dick explained the visit of the Fairfield men, the taking of powder, Gordon's queer querulous condition. As Adam listened, leaning on his rifle, his bright eyes wandered the woods. His mouth was set in kind of a consciously intelligent expression. "Well," he said at the end, "I'll just mosey down his way and have a look. I ain't a complete fool, but I'm like you one way. I feel kind of fond of that girl Maggie. You load your gun and then we'll get along."

When Dick's gun was loaded, Adam reached up with one hand, grasped the stick between the hog's hind legs, and swung the carcass over his shoulder.

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"Fifty pounds. Well growed. Must be good pickings round here for a hog. Better than for humans." He started off at a sturdy, easy stride of his short legs, going with a silence that Dick, for all his youthful lankness, envied.

Over his shoulder Adam remarked, "It's always seemed kind of interesting, the way the Lord provides for pigs, human or hog ones."

Dick said nothing. In spite of Adam's load, the little man went quickly. He seemed familiar with every tree in the woods.

Adam Dingman trapped the West Canada Valley. He said he had a cabin to summer in somewhere near the top of West Canada Creek, maybe thirty miles north of German Flats. He had trapped that way for years, he had his own trail beaten in; but after the Mounts and Gordons came, he used to make a detour to the Gordon clearing. He like to stop and ask a meal.

Gordon had great faith in Adam's judgment, and Maggie liked him, though she pitied him because he seemed so ignorant. Perhaps Adam felt that, for he used to say, "I'm just a timber beast. And I'm scared of a pretty girl. But up here I can get away to cover when the skitters catch me." He would roll his eyes at Maggie and add solemnly, "It's hell and all to be a skeery man."

Now he led Dick swiftly back to the spring, down Maggie's winding little track, and to the house. The Gordons were still in the wheat field. Down the clearing they could be seen beside the golden palisade of grain, small,

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bent, sun-beaten figures, painfully crawling in the heat.

Adam looked a moment.

"I guess I'll just stay here and scald this hog and cut him up."

Dick looked longingly in the direction of the Gordons.

"I ought to get back home," he said.

"I guess your pa is just the same durn fool as ever." Adam made it sound like a question.

"He thinks there's nothing to all this," Dick answered. "He laughs at Mr. Gordon."

"Well, I ain't seen any signs of trouble, yet," said Adam.

He grinned as he watched the boy shamle off to the creek and wade across the ford.

"Hain't got the nerve to say good-bye to Maggie with me round," he said to himself. . . .

He dragged the carcass of the pig quickly to the shed, laid a fire in the open hearth outdoors, selected wood, filled the big black iron kettle, and had the water boiling in thirty minutes. He dipped the hog with a quick heave of his wrists, counted fifteen out loud, pulled back the pig, and started scraping off the hair. He worked handily. He had to dip the hog once more.

When the carcass was completely naked of hair, and white as human skin, he drew his skinning knife from its sheath, tested the edge, and cut the quarters out. He chopped the bones with single quick strokes of an axe. Then he went into the shed and found the flannel bags to put the fresh meat into. Outside again, he selected a tree where there seemed to be a faint drawing of air, hung up the bags,

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and called the job done.

By the time the Gordons slowly came up from the field, he had everything cleared up and was sitting on the door-sill whetting his knife slowly on Gordon's stone.

"Adam!" exclaimed Maggie. "What are you doing this way in August?"

"Walking round," said Adam. "Herkimer thought I ought to take a walk. I guess he thought I was skeering the militia. I told the boys the Russians was with Sillinger."

"Russians?"

Adam nodded solemnly. Gordon, he noticed, was not listening. He had slumped down with his back to the wall of the house, and Adam thought he looked sickly.

"'Course," said Adam, "I just made up what I said about the Russians. I don't know there's any of them with Sillinger. I just wanted to occupy the boys." He said to Gordon, "Getting in your wheat?"

Gordon nodded.

"We're trying to get it all cut down and stacked before we have to move."

Maggie nodded wearily. "Dad's set on it. I tell him what's the difference—if we have to move."

Watching Gordon, Adam nodded. "Got to get it in though."

"Yes," said Gordon, his voice lifting with a little eagerness. "That's it. Got to get it in."

Adam met Maggie's eye. He winked his own in a knowing way.

"Dick Mount killed you a hog and dressed it. He had to

go home."

"That was nice of him," said Maggie.

"I thought so, too," said Adam. "I left the liver of it in a pail. I thought maybe there'd be an end for me."

She smiled again. Her back ached. She was thinking with a kind of agony what a hot job scalding a hog would be after a morning in the field.

She said, "Of course, Adam," and went inside.

As soon as she had gone, Gordon turned to Adam.

"What's the news from the valley?"

"Nothing much. The militia's mustered at Dayton. It was almost all in when I left last evening. They expect to start for Stanwix tomorrow. I'm just running a scout."

"Seen anything?"

"Not a hair. I came up here because I was worried about you folks. But I guess you're all right."

"What do you think's going to happen?"

As he met Gordon's querying stare, Adam Dingman's eyes lost all their sharpness. They rolled a little, modestly.

"I reckon there's going to be some doings, Gordon."

"Do you think you'll drive out Sillinger?"

"If Herkimer listened to me, maybe we will," said Adam. He lowered his voice. "Anyway, you don't have to worry for a spell. The first place they'll head for, if they lick us, is right down the flats. If we lick them, you'll have plenty of time to finish up your work. I'm going to leave you my powder, all but a charge or two."

"That's too much, but I'll take it, just the same," said Gordon. "You're a good friend, Adam."

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"Shucks," said Adam. "I'll come back for it after the fight. Let you know what happened. I'm a ranger, so I'll range a little when I want to. You and Maggie been nice to me," he added rather shyly.

"That's nothing. It's fun for us to have you visit. But aren't militia laws pretty strict about what you do with your powder?"

Adam rolled his eyes again. He heard Maggie coming quickly through the kitchen. "I'll just tell them a hedgehog ate it on me. I'll say the hedgehogs up here eat gunpowder to shoot their quills with."

"Adam!" cried Maggie, coming through the door. "You scalded and cut up that hog for me!"

"Me? Oh no. Me and Dick done that. And he dressed out the hog, too. I just wanted to practice how a hog would look with a Russian after it. I never thought of getting the rest done."

"Well you did. You and Dick both." Her face had brightened. As she looked at her father, it brightened further.

"Maggie," he said to her. "Adam's leaving us his powder."

"Oh." Somehow the woods had drawn away. She felt happier than she had at any moment in the past two days.

"And he's going to let us know how things are happening in the valley."

"Sure," said Adam. "You two ain't got anything to worry over. I'll let you know when it's time to move."

They had an almost merry meal. Before it, Adam had asked for some fresh soap to wash with. Woman, he re-

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marked in thanking Maggie, was God's gift to man, but soap was woman's gift to man. An ignorant timber beast like himself found both kind of hard to come by.

But when he emptied the slop water for her, he said quickly, "What's the matter with Gordon?"

"I don't know, Adam. He's awfully worried. He's crazy to get in his wheat. But the work seems to make him sick."

"It wouldn't be a *decline*," Adam ruminated softly. "It wouldn't be *ague* either. He's a healthy-living man, too."

"He seems much better since you got here," Maggie said.

"Well," said Adam, "you're a gritty girl. Don't get more worried than you have to. I'll be back some day pretty quick."

He left his powder and went away early in the afternoon, striking westerly through the woods to make a loop across the Canada Creek. His stocky figure seemed ridiculously squat and short in the shadow of the high woods.

4. *The Wheat*

ALL afternoon the Gordons worked at the wheat. An hour before sunset, Maggie stopped reaping to bind and shock what they had mown. In one day they had more than equalled the first two days of Gordon's work.

He seemed even more encouraged than he had at dinner. But he was utterly exhausted and just sat down in the kitchen by the window, where he could stare at the field.

"We'll get it in," he said. "We'll get it in. If I can get it threshed and drawn down to the Falls, we'll have enough to live on, even if we have to move."

Once she had come in out of the sun, Maggie could hardly stir her legs or arms. Her back ached so that it was difficult to stand erect. But gradually that wore off, and she went out to the barn and loosed the horses to let them go down to the creek. She watched them drink and then head off together for the beaver fly they grazed in during the nights.

Just at sunset her listening ears picked up the clank of Brownie's bell, and she went out to hurry the cow home. She milked, and the cow, relieved, went off after the horses.

T H E W H E A T

They were alone, her father and herself. They were too tired to talk, more than to mention again Adam Dingman's visit and say it would be different, now that they were sure of knowing the news from the south.

It was only when she was cleaning up alone that it occurred to Maggie that Dingman might be killed. By then her father had gone into his room. She glanced into the dark room, making out his body, still as a dead man, lying along the blankets. She listened till she heard him breathing. It was a blessing that he could sleep.

She wished that she herself could sleep. But the thought of her loft bed, with the hot bark roof so close overhead, the two cowhide trunks for company, and the hams and flitches hanging from the roof-tree like a row of felons, stifled her. Up there a person would feel trapped. Besides, her back seemed to ache at the very thought of bed. She sank down in their one backed chair, where her father had sat, and stared unseeingly into the darkness beyond the window.

Now and then small thoughts and impulses toward thought stirred in her and vanished before she comprehended them—like bats, that one saw only after they had passed.

She thought of Adam Dingman making his long night march in the solitude of the woods. She thought of the Fairfield men; by now they would be in the British camp, and David Murray would be sitting by a fire. She wondered if it was as hot down there in the southwest as it was here in the clearing in Jerseyfield. She began remembering bits of

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her life before they came to Jerseyfield. They had spent a winter on Isaac Paris's farm while her father worked in the store and Mr. Paris went down to New York on business. Another time, when she was very small, they had stayed a while in the town of Schenectady. She had a longing now for the place, the stone houses along the river; the green wide pasture for the cattle; the square brown stone-and-timber fort where the gun thudded at sunset and soldiers beat on their drums, a comforting thing to hear when you looked across the river at the great north woods—the same woods where she, Maggie Gordon, was now alone.

She was ashamed to have thought that with her father in the next room. And then she was frightened. Suppose he was really sick; she did not know. There was no way for her to find out. The nearest doctor that she knew anything about would be in German Flats; Dr. William Petry was his name. But it was twenty miles by road to Little Falls, and then eight miles more westward, unless like Adam Dingman, you knew the woods and could cut cross-country. Even if one could send word to the doctor, he would be towards Stanwix with the militia. There was no earthly way for Maggie to find out what ailed her father.

She had a thought that she might ask Mrs. Mount about it. But the idea of going to Mrs. Mount and hearing her worries, now that she herself was worried, was too much to bear. And Mrs. Mount had little learning in the matter of sickness. She purged her family twice a year with sulphur and senna, and let it go at that.

T H E W H E A T

All the clearing was black. Maggie could not see beyond the nearer edge of wheat. She was conscious of the last calls of a thrust in the woods behind the spring. Then the silence came in.

She sat in a kind of coma, until the airlessness of the night became too much for her to stand. Her clothes stuck to her skin, her feet felt hot and dry. The small sound that the creek made brought the only coolness, and she got up slowly from her chair, thinking that, in spite of the risk of ague, she would go down and bathe her feet.

But when she reached the door and saw the pitch darkness before her, she couldn't summon enough nerve to step out into it by herself. It gave her a panicky feeling to think how often she had been used to run down to the tiny mill pond on just such nights. If there were only someone near by to speak. Just to hear one human voice, one word, even. Yet she knew that if she heard one human word now out of the darkness she would be too terrified to move.

Perhaps she was understanding a little of Mrs. Mount's perpetual talk about the silence. While her father was well, all during their first years on this place, it had never occurred to Maggie to fear silence.

She had returned to her place by the window and was sitting rigidly there, when the moon rose at last. The final quarter—it made only a dim light through the clearing. It was too dim for her to see clearly, but light enough to show a thing that moved.

She saw it moving down beyond the wheat. At first she

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had thought it one of the shocks of grain; then she saw it pass into the shadow.

After a moment it emerged again and started on a slow patrol of the clearing.

Though Maggie was too frightened to call her father, she forced herself to get the musket down. She shook a little priming into the pan. Crouching by the door, she tried to discover what kind of animal it was.

At last it crossed between her and the bright water of the creek and she saw that it was a man. He turned opposite her and walked noiselessly for the cabin. Twice she lifted the gun, but each time her hands shook as if they were palsied. Finally she set it down to call her father. But then she saw the shape stop, as if whoever it was looked towards her. She sobbed suddenly as she thought at last who it must be.

"Dick."

"Maggie. You up?"

When he reached her, she was bent forward over her knees and crying into her hands.

"Maggie! What's the matter?"

He comforted her so by being there that she could not tell him. "I guess I'm tired," she said. "And Dad hardly talked and went right to bed."

"Yes," he said. "I guess you're tired. Girls don't know how big their notions are until they try them out."

"Men either!" she said, lifting her head. Then she laughed, with a sob in her throat. "Oh, Dick. I didn't know who you were, and Dad was like a dead person the way he

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slept. And I got the gun and aimed it at you but I couldn't pull the trigger. I tried twice."

"Let's see." He took the gun. "You didn't cock it," he said scornfully.

"I must have forgot." She shivered. "I was so scared. But thank God I did forget. I might have hit you."

He said, "I guess I would have been safe enough."

"How do you know?" she asked indignantly. "Adam says I'm a good shot for a girl."

"Good?" He was sarcastic.

"Oh, Dick! Let's not start arguing. It's too nice just having you here. How are all your folks over there?"

"Fine. Pa's up and mighty as a dollar."

"Did you have trouble with him?"

"Some," he said.

"What kind?"

"The same as usual. He tried to tell me I'd have to stay to home. We argued some. Tonight I told him I was coming over here. And he said if I done it again, he'd give me what for, and I said I'd shoot him if he did. And then Ma cried and I lit out."

"Dick," she said seriously, "you mustn't quarrel with him about us."

"If it wasn't you, it'd be something else. It didn't used to be that way. I guess it's just Pa likes to be boss bullock in our family and don't like me setting up my own ideas."

"You'd better go back home," she said.

"No. I'll stick around, awhile." He paused. "But you'd better get to bed now. It's late. Past moonrise, and that's

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midnight now. I'll get along when you have got to bed, if you want, but I'd just as lief stay here."

He took her place in the doorway. She whispered "Good night" from the kitchen dark, and quietly mounted the loft-ladder. It was comforting to sleep, knowing he was downstairs.

She did not know when he had left, but it must have been in the morning, for a small fire was burning on the hearth when she came down. She felt touched, even while she knelt down and rearranged the sticks to suit herself.

That morning, too, Mount and his wife came over.

George was sweating a good deal. He said, "We been having trouble with Dick the last little while. He stays away from home. He was out all last night. I had some time with him this morning and he said he'd spent the night over here." He wiped his forehead, blew his nose. His fat face got brick red. "I don't know what there is between him and your Maggie. I done my best to lick it out of him, but all he said was nothing. But I thought you'd better know about it."

He hawked and spat, and having said his say, looked at once defensive and relieved.

Maggie turned pale. She could imagine the scene. Mount like a great burly bear; Dick white-lipped and rigid, his thin face with that look of hate it sometimes had; the little boys looking curiously on, the Negro with his eyes like popcorn, white and brown and bursting; Mrs. Mount in tears. Her eyes were red-rimmed, even yet.

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Gordon answered, sickle in hand, "I didn't know he'd been over except yesterday morning. He killed a pig for us. We hadn't any powder then."

"Oh, that's all right. You have to be neighborly," said George. "I was glad he did when he told me about it."

("That's a lie," thought Maggie, staring at his big furred hands.)

"But when he comes over here all night, he hain't much good for working next day," pursued George.

Maggie said scornfully, "Dad was so dead tired, Dick thought somebody ought to be handy. He sat in the door all night, Mr. Mount." She drew her breath. "If you want to know, I wanted him to stay."

"Now why didn't he tell me?" demanded George. "Then there wouldn't have been all this business. But he's a pup for being stubborn." He laughed a little. "I guess he set there imagining war and Indians and such cock-ideas." He shuffled his feet. "Well, Maggie, if it makes you feel easier, I don't care. I just thought your Pa had ought to know."

Gordon said wearily, "Maggie's a dependable girl, George. You ought to know that."

"Yes," his wife said suddenly. "Hain't I been telling you?"

George Mount mumbled with embarrassment, flushed and walked down into the wheat.

The mother looked after him for a minute, then swung on Maggie. "Dick's the only one that cares for me. Do you love him?"

"Oh, dear," thought Maggie. She said aloud, her voice

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tired, conscious of the sweat in her eyes, "I told him, no. I like Dick, Mrs. Mount. But he isn't old enough for me to marry. He's younger than I am."

"Not much. A week or two. He's a good boy."

"I think he is, too," Maggie said helplessly.

The woman lifted her faded eyes, pushed back her grey hair from her forehead with one hand and held it there.

"Then why do you go leading him over here?"

"I don't. I told him what I just told you."

The woman stared away across the clearing, speaking in a toneless voice, as if it didn't matter.

"If you just go leading him, and teasing him, I'll hate you all my life."

Maggie's eyes grew large.

"Oh, Mrs. Mount."

"I mean it. Men!" she said, scornfully, staring to where Gordon had resumed his reaping while George looked on. "Any man ain't worth the thinking of—but once. Except Dick."

"Yes," said Maggie.

"They all drean you except him. They take you into the woods and they shut you up for years there. They build you a house. You work all day alone. You look out on a lot of stumps. There hain't a thing to hear except the birds squawking. There hain't a thing to smell except the woods and manure heap back of the shed. When they come home, they ding your ears with talk of cutting trees, how hard it is to hoe, the way the plow got broke. They go to town themselves to get the flour. God help me, Maggie," she said

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quietly, "if I could only hear a church bell once a week. Just once a week."

Maggie said softly, "Yes, I understand."

"Understand!" cried Mrs. Mount. "You understand? You can't understand nothing till you've had your baby way out here. A woman don't know nothing till that's happened. Nine of them, one after the other. Wait till you've seen them pine or get the intermittent. All you can do is have another one. You know how old I am? I'm only just over thirty years and look at me." She turned on her heel, and said over her shoulder, "Dick's the only one that's been worth-while. You're taking him from me. It's right for him. If you love him, you'll be happier than I be. He won't treat you this way. Men! They'll go to town and buy themselves a plowshare; but they can't afford a doctor. If you don't love him, though, and fool with him, I hope you'll be like me, just to know what you've lost. . . ." Her voice trailed off.

Maggie simply stared.

The woman suddenly turned back. Her eyes were wet.

"Oh, Maggie, I hadn't ought to talk to you like this. You've been nice to me, too. It's only I love Dick so well. And it was awful this morning."

"How is he? Did George lick him bad?"

"Not bad. I got him to leave off and come over here first." Her voice broke. "George ain't really bad-tempered. It's just his way. He's never raised his hand on me, the way some men do. I don't know what I'm saying."

George came up then, all his fat face embarrassed.

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"Listen, Maggie. We got to go home. I see your Pa ain't very well. And I'll tell Dick he can do just as he's a-mind to about coming over."

"Thank you," she said mechanically. She felt as if she had been bled.

Neither she nor her father spoke of the visit till dinner, when he said, "If you should want to marry Dick, I'd be willing. I leave it up to you." . . .

That night when Dick came over, she was kind to him. Not that she felt towards him any differently. The fact that he had had a licking because of her made him seem more like a boy than ever. She couldn't imagine a man like Murray being licked on account of any girl.

As for Dick, he said hardly a word. He seemed to be contented just to be around. And his presence did appear to take the deathly loneliness from the clearing.

As, day after day, they worked through the wheat, and the standing grain steadily decreased in area, Gordon's spirits picked up. He seemed to work easier, and Maggie began to think that he was getting well again.

Besides, they had had no word from the south and Dick had found no signs of anyone in the woods around Black Creek. Maggie grew used to the sense of danger; little by little, she began to forget her fear at night.

In two weeks she and her father had finished the reaping, and Dick came over for a day and helped them cart the shocks to the barn. They laid it up in two stacks, handy to the door to take in and thresh. They threshed out a little

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together that Dick might carry it home with him in a sack, and the next evening he turned up with their first home-ground flour. Even to Maggie that seemed a wonderful thing. Mount had sent a bill by Dick. It was written on a little scrap of paper. Two cents for grinding a couple of quarts. The heading said "Mount's Mill." They laughed together at the notion.

"Pa says you ain't to eat it. The wheat's a little green yet, he thinks."

Gordon nodded at Dick.

"Yes," he said. "We'll wait a week before we start real threshing."

Maggie spent the week stripping the corn leaves from the standing stalks. There was no grass to harvest in the woods, except on beaver flies, but they were used for pasture. So for the cow's green fodder, as soon as the ears had set on the corn, the leaves were stripped by hand. Later the dry stalks would be harvested also.

It was light work after the reaping, and Maggie did it by herself. She had persuaded her father to take things easy till the threshing started.

Sometimes Dick lent her a hand for an hour or two, but he came less regularly. He seemed more cheerful though, and they talked about what they would do if their families decided to move south for the winter. It was exciting for Dick to think of. He might get a chance to join the army for a three months' 'listment. . . .

The idea did not last; George Mount guffawed at the notion of going south. He came over one Sabbath afternoon

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with Dick and talked the business over with Gordon.

"Ain't I been right?" he demanded. "Whatever has become of that there Sillinger, we ain't noticed it, have we? We didn't notice it when the armies was in Canada. There's been two years of war, but we didn't notice them. Tea up? Sugar up? We make our maple sugar for ourselves and who needs tea anyway?" He rocked himself on the stool; his face tilted up, like a bear feeling funny. "North America is quite a good-sized country. What the devil difference does a war make to it?" His staring eyes seemed to say, "And I'm quite a good-sized man; and what the devil difference does it make to me?"

"That's right," agreed Gordon. "I guess you've been right. I guess I got my nerve up just for nothing."

"Of course you did," said George. "But you was sick. I could see that with half an eye. It's natural." He leaned over the table. "Know what I figure to do? Well, sir, I figure not to sell no wheat. I figure to grind it all in flour, and then I'll take it down in winter, when the flour's short, and sell it di-rect to Fort Dayton and army posts. I'll undersell Ellice. It's a government mill now. We can undersell any government concern, there's no gravy in our business. *And*, by then I reckon flour prices will be high!"

"It's a good idea," said Gordon.

Maggie was amazed to see them so, projecting projects just the way they used to.

"How'll you carry it down, George?"

"That's the trouble. I've got to find me barrels. I figure on going down tomorrow to get barrels. I'll look around in

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Fairfield. The folks at Reeber's can tell me which people went to Canada. Casselman used to lug in flour for the town, he might have had some. They're no use to him when he's in Canada. But if I can't find enough there, I'll have to go down to Snyder's and pick up some to salt our pork in. See?" He roared and rocked again.

"Salt pork?" Gordon laughed, too.

"Why," said Mount, "what's the sense of war if nobody makes nothing out of it?"

Next morning, sure enough, he came down through the ford with his cart and team and headed south into the tunnel of the Jerseyfield road. He was gone overnight, so Dick spent the night at home.

But the next afternoon Mount returned with a dozen barrels precariously loaded on the cart. He sat on the seat, hanging his legs over the horses' rumps and chuckled handsomely.

"Sure," he said, "I picked them up here and there. Some was used for pork and other things. They'll need to be scrubbed out. There's plenty of good things in them houses. I found a mattock there, brand new. I took a share from Empie's plow. I got some little things for all the kids." He rolled his eyes. "Why it beat going to town. Variety and no expense, you might say."

Gordon looked serious.

"That's stealing, George."

"By thunder, you was willing about barrels."

"Yes. But barrels are barrels. We actually needed them."

"Now listen, ain't they threatened to burn you out?"

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Didn't they lift your powder off you? Look! I brought Maggie a real nice crochet hook. I found it sticking down inside a crack of the floor in McGlashen's. Must have dropped it when she lit out at night. It looked like y-vory to me."

He fished it from his shirt and handed it down.

Gordon said, "Don't take it, Maggie. I won't have you taking stolen goods."

"Now, Rob." Mount flushed. But he was too pleased to take offense. "I reckon it is y-vory though." And they all looked at the yellow, slender little stick. They thought it must be ivory. Mount nodded solemnly. "That little tricky article. Imagine. Once it was an elephant way off in . . . where do elephants live, Rob?"

"Africa," said Gordon,

"Africa? Well I'll be durned. I'm going to show this here to Turp. Being black, he ought to know for sure. I'll tell you later."

He gathered up his reins.

"Did you hear any news?" asked Gordon.

"Gol. Think of that. After I got to thinking this was y-vory I clean forgot. Boy, boy—it's just what I expected. They had a fight above Oriskany Crick. The militia took an awful lacing. Lost three hundred out of seven hundred men. But they dinged Johnson's men and gave the Indians all they wanted. I talked to Mrs. Ritter down in Snyder's. Jake had his throat cut there, she'd heard. He was dead anyways. She said she'd been told it was by Casselman."

"No," said Gordon. "I hardly believe that."

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"Well you don't make money believing it. Do as you're mind to. It's a fact about the fight, though."

"Is Stanwix holding out?"

"Holding out?" He slapped his legs. "You got ideas. Listen. After that battle, Schuyler sent up General Arnold. Yes sir, General Arnold himself, with the Massachusetts Brigade. Learned's men, they say. A thousand of 'em. And Sillinger took such a fright, him and the Injuns, that he's high-tailed it clean to Canada. Down there they're out and working just the same way as they did afore the war. It's just about as good as over now. The Butlers and the Johnsons had their lesson, you can bet. Why they even got young Walter Butler captured and in jail. Old Ben Arnold would have hanged him, but Schuyler had him sent down to Albany instead. A good idea. John Butler's going to watch his step with Walter locked up that way. I call it cute, myself."

Gordon had gone pale.

"Is that all true?"

"True as Gospel and George Mount can make it."

Maggie thought for a minute she saw tears in her father's eyes.

"Why," he said, "we can go on and thresh and do our work the same as ever."

"Sure," said George. "Ain't I always said so?" And then he added, "The folks at Reeber's Settlement have all cleared out. I bet they feel like fools."

He laughed and turned his team. As the horses splashed across the ford, the cart teetered and rocked and the barrels

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thumped and George yelled, "Hye! Hye! Hye!" to his horses. Like old times. For the moment it seemed as if the silence of six weeks was broken.

Maggie felt weak. She turned with her father to the house. "Look, Dad," she said. "There's rain coming, surely."

He looked.

Above the woods a long level line of blue-grey clouds hung low. They came from the southwest.

Rain. It was like Providence. There was an underscud of white. For the first time in almost two months they saw the leaves turn silver. Wind. A pine on a hill southward started waving its upper branches, as if it had volition of its own. The air was cool. It stirred slowly through the clearing. From far away a sound like rushing water came to their ears.

"Look!" said Maggie.

In the stubble, drops like bullets struck the dirt, making little clouds of dust. The rain fell at a slight slant. The woods turned green. One of the horses up the clearing arched his tail and kicked his heels and the old cow shook her ears at the unaccustomed touch of water.

"Rain."

Father and daughter felt it on themselves. They lifted their faces to the drops, and Maggie raised her bare arms. The wind came into the sleeves, soft and damp. Her breast seemed to fill. Her mouth relaxed and her eyes grew darker.

Suddenly she caught him by the arm.

"Come, Dad. We've got to run—or we'll get wet."

THE WHEAT

Her voice was gay; she let go of his arm and raced for the door. She ran with her elbows at her sides, her brown legs flashing.

When Gordon came in after her, she had closed the window.

"I had to. It was raining in already."

The roof ticked overhead, drops made a curtain off the eaves. A sigh, as from a thirsty world, filled all the air.



5. Return of Adam Dingman

MAGGIE was happy. She thought of David Murray sometimes nowadays, especially when Dick came over, sullen and silent, because he now would have no chance to join the army.

"Cheer up, Dick. We'll all get rich as anything. With our mill."

"Our Pas maybe, Maggie."

"And us, too. You'll find a girl that's twenty times as pretty as me. Maybe there'll be war for a while in Jersey, where Washington is, and then the British will go home. People will come back again. He'll come back this way."

Dick lifted his head quickly.

"He? Who?"

She was so gay, she said unguardedly, "David Murray."

"I didn't know of him."

She told him then about the Fairfield man.

"There's no such man in Fairfield," said Dick.

"Well he was with them, Dick."

Gradually he made her tell him the whole business.

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"That's why you kissed me that night!"

"I'll kiss you again," she said mischievously. "You're like my brother. Isn't it all right to try on you?"

"I'll not take them that way," he said sullenly. He could not see that at that moment Maggie loved all the world. In the barn her father was threshing. The sound of his flail thumped healthily.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "I love you, too."

"But you wouldn't marry me."

"Don't talk so like a little boy. The way you scowl down at your feet. They're muddy enough to frown at, too." And she laughed at him.

In spite of that, he came again. He couldn't seem to keep away, and Maggie was unaware of the dependence she took from his sombre, brooding eyes.

He was there the afternoon that Dingman finally came back to the clearing.

Dick had been giving Gordon a hand and Maggie had been winnowing; but they had all stopped to come into the kitchen for a drink of birch beer. They were sitting there when they heard the sound—a queer deep moaning note.

"What's that?" Dick's head had lifted.

They crowded to the window.

A fine mist was driving over the clearing to a northwesterly wind.

Dick was the first to spot him.

"It's Adam," he said. "Over there."

Then the other two saw him, sauntering out of the woods, rifle on his arm. Even so far away, they could distinguish

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the deerskin patch over the lock of the gun, the bright blue of his eyes against the shining redness of his face.

He saw them all in the window and raised his left arm, and a little cascade of water ran off the brim of his sopping black felt hat.

Then, in a moment, he had come in the door, with a wet fresh gust of air, smelling himself of soaked deerskin.

"Hello," he said. "You've got in all your wheat."

He leaned his gun in the corner and sat down as naturally as could be, while the drops fell slowly from the thrums of his green shirt.

They just stared at him. It was odd to think that here in Jerseyfield they were in the same room with a man who had been in the actual finish of the war.

"You all look good," he said.

"And how are you, Adam?" Gordon asked. "We expected you earlier than this."

"Yes. I did myself. I got nicked down at Oriskany."

"Where?" Dick's face was narrow and tense.

"I hain't going to mention where."

Maggie's eyes sparkled and as for Dick and Gordon, they laughed aloud.

"I would have been embarrassed explaining it until I could set down," said Adam. Then he asked, "Did you hear my new conkshell horn?"

"Was that that noise we heard?"

"Yes, it was. I got to carry it now, though it's the devil bumping a man's ribs." From under his arm he took a conch shell. "All ranger lieutenants carry them. I'm in the

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Dayton company. Though I don't see what good it is for me to blow it. There hain't nobody to hear it."

He put it to his lips and blew softly, filling the room with the same hollow sound.

"You got to be an officer," said Dick.

"Yes, young man. I did. You'd better call me Mister, too, I guess." He put the shell on the table for them all to wonder at. "I got the northern section to patrol now. Just me to cover twenty miles in two directions. Ain't it wonderful the way those congress bug-tits work it out? Down in Jersey they'd have a comp'ny of dragoons to do that work. Up here it's Adam Dingman. Down there a flea can't tickle a dog's ear without the county sees it, but up here you could put the whole British Army into a cup and saucer and nobody'd believe you if you told them."

He sighed and stretched. "Wet weather, folks." And he grinned as they fired questions at him.

Yes, the British had gone. Gansevoort even had took a vacation, though the plain soldiers had to stay at Stanwix yet. It was a nasty fight. Everybody for themselves and Herkimer setting in the shade. They were licked proper when a storm came up. Did that storm hit Jerseyfield? It was a dinger, sure. But it gave the militia time to get together. Then they mowed down quite a swathe of Indians and tories. Joseph Brant had found it too hot to suit him.

Adam's jaw got grim. He'd seen things. . . . Herkimer was dead: the best man in the valley. When Gordon finally got up to go to the barn threshing floor, Adam followed.

"Listen," he said, "I don't want to scare Maggie. You'd

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better plan on getting out of here, Gordon. Get Mount to go with you, if you can. And if you can't, let the dog-eared fool get ruined for himself. I know Indians. They're going to try and get it back on us for that fight. And so are the Butlers and the Johnsons and all their people. It's right there ain't going to be no regular army work awhile up this way, but what there is will be twicet as bad for people like you."

Gordon's flail hung limp from his hand, the threshing stave like a dead tail on the floor.

"You don't mean that."

"I didn't expect you to believe. You make up your mind, though. I'll be around a day or two and I can watch out."

He stopped as Maggie and Dick came through the door. Gordon turned away from her so that she could not see his face.

"I just heard Brownie's bell," she said. "She's over against the ridge. I think she must be heading for the beaver fly, instead of coming home, and I thought I'd fetch her before it got too wet."

"All right," said Gordon. "Go along."

Adam grinned as he leaned on his gun.

"Dick's going with me," she said.

The two older men watched them pass out into the mist. Dick carried a switch and Maggie had a shawl over her head.

"I mean what I say, Gordon. There's times for everybody to hold out and there's times a man just can't afford to be a fool."

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Gordon sat down.

"You must be crazy, Adam. Why, I felt that way a while back, but now they're licked, I'd thought everything was safe again. I can't quit. Everything Maggie and I have is here."

"I know that. Take out what you can." Adam's face was earnest. "I ain't seen signs yet, but I feel it's coming. You're an old man, Gordon. You're too old to stand up to what's coming."

"It's been so quiet. Just the way it is now."

Gordon stopped and listened to the rain. Adam listened with him. Through the mist they heard the cowbell ringing southward against the ridge. It went along steadily.

All at once Adam stepped to the door.

"Listen," he said.

"Listen to what?"

"That bell, you fool. Hush up!"

Again Adam stood stock still. His ears seemed visibly to stretch. His red face, atop his stocky body, was lifted against the mist.

Gordon stood at his side.

"It's just the cow," he said. "She wanders some in fall."

"Keep still," Adam seemed to count as the bell was silent for a moment. Then, without a word, he broke for the woods, running.

Maggie and Dick had gone only a little way when Adam caught up with them.

"Get back home," he said, staring beyond them through

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the trees, "and don't make no noise either."

He listened again to the bell.

"Why, Adam, what do you mean?"

"Go home." His voice was harsh. "Git, I tell you. You make her go, Dick. And don't talk."

Dick stared at him.

"Git, you fool. Quick! Git into the house and wait for me."

Maggie at last felt the wrongness in the rain. She did not know what. She pushed back the shawl from her face.

"Adam," she whispered, "where are you going?"

His heavy mouth grinned briefly.

"I'm going to fetch that cow."

Like a shadow he stepped beyond them. He seemed to drift into a growth of witch hobble, leaving them alone in the rain, the smell of wet leaves, the soft steam of the woods, in which the tree trunks rose like strips of satin shadow.

"Maybe we'd better go," said Dick.

"What do you think it is?" Maggie whispered back. Then, "Dick. He looked so queer."

"Come on." He took her hand.

Behind them they heard the steady sound of the bell. It wandered past where the swamp should be and hung for a while almost still on the ridge, just giving a single clank from time to time. The note seemed to float over their heads. It had a mellowness in the wet air. It was gentle. It made one inevitably think of Brownie's amiable bony head and twitching ears.

Dick's hand was urgent.

"Come along."

R E T U R N O F A D A M D I N G M A N

Still Maggie did not understand.

They slipped down together by the spring, and stopped for a brief instant. The house and barn were grey in the rain, dim, homely shapes. Inside the barn they heard the flail strike haltingly upon the boards.

The two heard it; then again the bell sounding behind them. It was stilled once more. Then just a clank.

The noise of the flail ceased. It made a slight thud, as if Gordon had dropped it. Then the bell rang softly, once again, from the same place.

"Something's the matter with Dad," Maggie whispered. "Adam wanted to tell us. That's why he went for Brownie. Hurry, Dick."

She ran to the barn door with Dick at her heels.

Her father was standing in the beaten straw, his arms close to his sides, his wide-open eyes fixed upon the window.

Looking through the window, as she often did, was the cow. She wore no bell at all.

At that instant, all four of them heard the shot. Maggie and Dick spun together to face the sound; and at the same time, Brownie lifted her head and twitched her ears with bovine complacency.

It was nearly an hour before Adam Dingman returned to the clearing. By then the light had faded, early as it was, to a kind of dusk. The rain came harder, hammering on the bark roof and flowing down the windows with a dreary sibilance.

In the kitchen, where Maggie and her father and Dick

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Mount sat together, the candle she had lighted covered their faces less with light than a pale yellowness. The boy had taken down the musket, drawn the charge, reloaded it; and now he sat with his back to the chimney. His face wore a slight frown, as though he had a hope that somebody might turn up to let him show what he could do in an emergency.

Whenever Maggie shifted on her stool, causing the loose leg to squeak, his frown deepened. He would glance sideways at her white face, compressing his lips; but he forebore scolding her. Then, in the renewal of silence, his body would hunch forward over the gun on his knees, and he would be utterly motionless, as if he listened with all his senses.

Maggie instinctively sat at her father's side. She wished to comfort him by her presence. At first she had been surprised by the way he had taken the sound of the single rifle shot. Less than a year ago she would have expected him to take command of any situation. But it had been Dick who brought them into the house and barred the doors. Gordon had come without a word, nodding his head a little, and he sat down and bowed his face in his hands like an old and brokenhearted man.

"Is he going to get sick again?" Maggie thought.

She could see his chin quivering from time to time, which made her suddenly afraid that he might be going to cry. She could not imagine what it would be like to see him cry; she had never seen a man do that; and if he did, she could not bear to think of Dick's being witness to it.

She remembered the times she had run to her father, cry-

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ing herself, with childish hurts, when he had comforted her with the sense of unshakeable serenity he gave her; and it did not seem credible that he should cry. She touched him with her hand, but got no answer. So she sat still, listening to the rain, and wondering what Adam Dingman was up to.

She thought of him as he must have slowly stalked the sound of the cowbell. But for him, she and Dick might have walked right up to it; and she tried to imagine what it would have felt like to see, not Brownie with the bell, but—she could not imagine it at all. She only shivered, shifted on her stool, and met Dick's intense frown. . . .

They heard the soft slopping of feet in the mud beyond the door and then Adam's plain voice hailed them. Dick took down the bar to let him in.

He entered, wet and steaming, laid the rifle carefully on the table and put down Brownie's bell, which he had been carrying by the clapper.

Maggie had risen from her seat, her eyes large with an unspoken question. Even Dick had not asked anything. But Adam merely shook the wet and sticking shirt loose from his shoulders and remarked that there was no fire.

"It makes me feel agueish coming in."

"I'll light it right off," said Dick.

Maggie, also feeling the instinct to serve him, asked whether there was anything he wanted.

"Well," said Adam, "if it ain't too much bother, I'd like a little hot milk."

He sat apologetically across the hearth from Gordon,

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his feet, shapeless in their wet heavy socks, stretched out to the blaze, and sipped his milk.

"I made a turn all round the clearing," he said. "I didn't see nothing but that feller's tracks. It's raining hard enough to wash them out afore tomorrow, I believe."

"How about *him*?" asked Dick.

"Him? Well, he was an Indian. Seneca. Had his paint on." He drank a little milk and eyed Dick over the rim of the cup. "Hain't much to say. I drug him down the ridge and sunk him in a waller. He was a youngster, probably running a lone trail. And that was a pretty cute idee, if I do say it. Ringing that bell." He glanced at Dick again, and grinned a little. "No, I didn't take his hair, Dick. It wouldn't be worth it without I went to Vermont. They pay cash there."

Gordon had raised his head.

"You think he really was out for trouble?"

"Well, if he wasn't, he took a lot of pains for nothing on a rainy day."

Maggie said, "I could feel kind of sorry for him. All by himself."

"Aw," said Adam. "It weren't a bad shot."

Maggie's wide-eyed stare embarrassed him, and he turned his eye to his conch shell. He treated it like a play-thing, shook it, found that it had water in it, emptied it, and set it by the fire to dry.

"Do you think wet would hurt one of them things?" he asked.

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Nobody knew.

Gordon asked, "What ought we to do, now, Adam?"

The trapper felt better to have the subject shifted.

"Well," he said, "there ain't much sense in running out blind. There don't seem to be any more of them in the woods right now, but I'd better look around tomorrow some. It's most likely that you wouldn't find a lot of them up this way yet. They'll probably go for Fairfield the first thing. But they're bound to use Black Crick sometimes coming down on the north side of the Valley. What I mean is, you can't stay here long. But there ain't no value in just running to the Valley till we know the road's clear."

Dick leaned forward tensely.

"Will you stay here tonight, Adam?"

"If it's all right with Gordon and Maggie."

"Then I might as well get home." He was plainly eager to tell his father.

"You cut along then," Adam said. "I'll look after Maggie the best I can."

It was strange how safe Adam's presence made Maggie feel, though. As he would have said himself, he wasn't much to rest a female eye against. But when she went out to the barn to milk the cow, she felt the darkness full of presences. The candle-lantern which she set down in the straw served only to bring the window closer, with its bright curtain of drops and sound of falling rain.

But she was spared what she most dreaded, going to the

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spring for water. When she finished the milking, Adam joined her at the door with two brimming buckets in his hands.

"I wasn't doing anything," he explained. "Your Pa ain't much company tonight, either."

"I hope he isn't going to get feeling sick again," she said.

"I don't see why he ought to, Maggie. But I guess when you get about so old, things mean a lot."

"Yes, Adam."

"I mean, your Pa ain't scared. He's just considering how bad he'll feel to move. He don't want to even now. When you're like him, it's pretty hard to make a new start, I guess."

She was grateful to Adam. And back in the kitchen once more, she tried to brighten things, as she got supper. She talked about how well the wheat was threshing out; she showed Adam her new white stockings that she hadn't worn yet; and then she got out the book of Martyrs that was kept wrapped in heavy canvas so that mice wouldn't gnaw its pages.

Adam was filled with interest at the pictures. If the religious significance escaped him, other details did not. "I don't believe a fire ever burned like that right on the top of the pile," he said. His hand shook as he tried to turn the pages without damaging them. "They didn't stop at much, did they? But mostly they was partial to fire."

"Yes, mostly," Maggie said.

He closed the book with a sigh, handed it to Maggie, and remarked, "It certainly is nice to have a book to look at.

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But I never done no reading. Did you read it?"

"Oh, yes," said Maggie.

"Maybe you'd read some of it to me some time."

"I'd be glad to, Adam."

They ate their supper quietly at the table. Now and then drops of rain hissed on the burning logs. A draught from the shed door fluttered the candle flames from time to time. . . .

In the morning, Maggie came down to find Adam already out of his blanket, which still lay spread out on the kitchen floor. The weather had cleared from the northwest and long grey clouds were sweeping through the sky. The wind was cold and strong; when she went to the door she felt it through her dress against all her body; with a chill pressure, like forewarning of snow.

Looking across the clearing, she saw only the woods and the bending tops of the trees, and four adventurous crows who made a crablike progress under the clouds. The soil in the wheat stubble was dark and sopping. The leafless stalks of corn, with the filled ears like bunions, cracked as they rocked in the wind. The water in the stiller stretches of the creek was dark, metallic blue.

Of Adam there was yet no sign, except the footprints going from the doorsill towards the mill.

Maggie turned inside, with her hands smoothing her blown hair, and crossed the kitchen in order to call her father. The room he slept in was next the shed, making an L of the building. It had one window that looked out towards the spring and took in the end of the barn. There

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was nothing in the room but a row of pegs to hold his clothes, a shelf with his razor, brush, and soap dish on it, and the double bed, made of mahogany wood, and strung with hemp. He had often said it would be left to Maggie when he died.

He was lying in it now, quite still, sunk in the feather tick so that the blanket lay almost level across him.

"Dad. It's time to get up."

She got no answer.

"Dad. It's late."

She became conscious of the sound of her own voice. He must be sleeping hard.

She went round the foot of the bed to see his face. He was lying quite still, his eyes were open; but their expression did not change as she passed in front of them.

"Dad!"

He's dead, she thought. And yet she did not think he looked like a dead person. She forced herself to approach the side of the bed and put her hand on his. It was cool, and it wasn't rigid. She could not tell. Then she remembered that she had been told a person's breath would cloud a glass if he were alive, so she got the bit of broken mirror that he used for shaving and held that close to his mouth.

Two tiny films of fog appeared, and went as quickly as they came.

"He isn't dead!"

She seemed to hear her whole heart saying it, and she was conscious of the blood in her face and of an impulse to be gay. But he was so still on the bed, so pale, with the

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lines on his face printed as if in stone, giving an effect of being a statue of himself, that she was once more overwhelmed with doubt; and once more reassured herself with the mirror.

Then she went anxiously to the front door to look for Adam. She had a feeling that Adam might know what to do, being such a hardy self-dependent person. But when she failed to see him she was frightened, and returned to the kitchen and tried to occupy herself with laying the fire and cooking breakfast. Finally she milked and, heating some in a pan, took a cupful into her father's room.

She said, "Would you like some hot milk, Dad, before you get up?" in a purposely easy voice. But he lay as he had been, speechless, and unmoving.

On his return, Adam took one look and clucked his tongue.

"He ain't dead, that's sure. I think he's got some kind of stroke, Maggie."

"Yes, Adam. What does a person do for that? Do you know?"

He scratched his head, long-faced, his blue eyes troubled.

"Seems to me I've heard somewhere that you put a plaster on them," he said, roving the wall with his eyes, as if he expected to find a clue there to the proper treatment. "I don't remember where, though. I mean where you put it, Maggie."

She shivered slightly.

"Do people die of strokes, Adam?"

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"I couldn't say. I expect you might die of most anything."

"What kind of plaster?"

"Mustard, or flax, or something. All I know is that they're hot and make you itch as if you had the crumbs."

She knew there was a little flaxseed in the shed, so she got that and she and Adam arranged a plaster with a piece of calico.

They finally laid it on Gordon's chest; then Adam, having had time to think of something else, found a piece of soapstone and heated it and put it to Gordon's feet.

"Now, Maggie," he said, "you keep ahold of yourself. I'm going to light out for the Falls and scout the road. I'll be back in two days. Maybe your Dad'll be all right then. Anyway, we'd ought to give him the chance before we lug him down in a cart. I've got to report this there to Dygert, and maybe get him to send up a bunch of men." He hoped he could persuade Pete Dygert; he wished that Herkimer was still alive. "You won't get too scared?"

Maggie shook her head. But she could not say anything. It was like finding oneself back in the same nightmare for the second time.

She still felt so when she saw him leave. He waved to her from the entrance of the Jerseyfield road. Then he was gone.

She said to herself, "Two days. Once he's back, we'll be all right."

6. *The Indian Dog*

AGAIN and again during the morning, she said the same thing to herself. She even talked aloud to herself for company. "You've got to be sensible, Maggie. You can't get frightened with Dad so sick. He's always taken care of you; it's your turn, for a change."

And later, "They've always been our neighbors, Maggie."

"Yes, but that Indian."

"Adam said, though, that there wasn't any signs."

"Well anyway, he'll be back before too long. It would be nice if Dick came visiting with us today, don't you think?"

"Most likely he won't come. He said last time he was here that they were threshing out their peas."

She reminded herself when it was time to get lunch. First she looked in again on her father and took the poultice and heated it. The pattern of the calico had come off on his chest, and she looked curiously at it on her father's white skin.

He still lay in his coma, saying nothing, unresponsive, the

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next thing, as it seemed to Maggie, to the edge of death. He would have been amused to see the pattern on himself, in blue and red. But he couldn't, and somehow she did not care to tell him about it, knowing he wouldn't smile.

When she had replaced the poultice, she went to the spring. On the way back she stopped and talked to the cow. Brownie was lying in the shelter of the barn wall, lackadaisically chewing her cud.

"Do you think he'll ever come back to see us?" Maggie asked, and added almost crossly, "I mean David Murray, you stupid thing."

But Brownie merely altered the curve of her tail to twitch a fly away.

"You wouldn't care who came!" Maggie said scornfully. "You never notice anything. You wouldn't know the difference between him and Dick, I bet."

She walked quite stiffly back to the kitchen.

It was neither Dick nor Murray; it was George and Mrs. Mount who came. They had the team hitched to the cart, and they stopped at the house for a moment, the woman almost cheerful-seeming, and the man as full as usual of noisy notions.

"Hello, there, Maggie. Where's your Pa?"

"He's inside." Maggie looked anxiously at Mrs. Mount's pale face. "Adam thinks he's had a stroke. He doesn't move or say or see at all. Do you know what that is?"

"No, Maggie. Maybe I would if I saw him."

"Yes, let's look at poor old Rob." George Mount bounced

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down from his seat on the cart, letting his wife make her own descent as best she could. He shook his fat head. "Too bad, too bad, about poor Rob. He ain't been like himself all this fall, I think. It surely is too bad."

He said the same thing when he had pushed his way into the bedroom. "Rob," he said in his heavy voice, then, "Rob! Rob Gordon!" until his voice seemed to shake the walls and Maggie felt her anger rise to see her father yelled at.

Mrs. Mount stared curiously. It was obvious to Maggie that she took a kind of satisfaction in seeing another person feeling poorly.

"No, I don't know what it is." She backed out of the room, and said more brightly, "I'll ask in the Falls what one ought to do. Somebody will know."

"The Falls? You're going down?" Maggie could hardly believe her ears. "Didn't Dick tell you about the Indian?"

"Sure," George Mount said as he rejoined them. "Crazy fool thing to do. Now somebody might think we done that. No Injuns ever would bother us up here. They like us. Why, look at all I've give to them."

"It did seem foolish of Adam, to me," Mrs. Mount observed complacently. Her mind was on her unexpected journey to the Valley. "George wants more barrels," she told Maggie. "And there's things I'd like to get and it seems like a last good chance afore the winter."

"Sure, sure." George was good-humored. "We'll be back in two or three days. I'll have to keep track of the price of millings, now."

He took his wife's arm in a hairy hand and pushed her

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out to the cart.

"But," said Maggie, following them with a pale face, "you're leaving the children all alone."

"Dick'll look out for them. I made him promise to. They're going to finish threshing the peas. But I told him he could come over here a couple of times." George winked.

"Oh."

"Why, Maggie, Indians ain't a-going to hurt you or them. They like the boys, and we always been nice to them, too."

"That's so," said Mrs. Mount.

One would have thought that in her excitement she had come to think the Indians pleasant people.

Maggie was getting supper all by herself when Dick came over. He had his three brothers and the slave in tow, or they had him. It was difficult to tell, for they ran about like young partridges, on their naked skinny legs—all but Cobus, the fat one, who had a kind of pompous wiggle to his round little rump, like his father. When they heard about Mr. Gordon they clamored at once to see so curious a sight as a person who looked dead and yet who wasn't.

"Get out, hush up," said Dick, flushing. "Ain't you any decency?"

"I wasn't going to laugh nor nothing," Cobus said, looking up with his fat, serious face. "But a man had ought to learn about things, hadn't he? Why goshamighty, Dick, ain't that the truth?"

"You shut your mouth," said Dick and drove them all from the kitchen. "And don't go yelling all around."

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He closed the door, while Henry and young George and the little Negro, scampering a safe distance off, began to chant, "Dick, he's moony, Dick, he's moony, Dick he's moony for Maggie!" They shrieked and laughed and then George added in a treble squeak that pierced the clearing from end to end, "But Maggie don't love him at all!"

Dick, blushing furiously, with the sweat all over his face, found it hard to meet her eyes.

"I couldn't help bringing them, Maggie," he said apologetically. "Don't listen to them."

"No," she said, seriously.

They glanced at each other like grown-up persons, conscious of manners to maintain, and presently the boys gave up their shrilling to examine the sawmill.

"Is there anything I can do?" Dick asked.

"I don't think so."

"Pa was possessed and all to go. And Ma, too. I never seen a person act so possessed as she was."

"It's going to be a treat for Mrs. Mount," said Maggie.

They looked at each other again, not knowing what else to say.

"Well," Dick said at length, "I got to get them back 'fore dark. I hope your Pa gets better."

"Adam's coming back soon," Maggie said with stiff lips.

"The wind's south," said Dick. "If you want anything, you just fire your gun. I'll keep a-listening and I'll come right over."

"I will," Maggie promised.

She stood in the door, watching them troop through the

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ford. The water was higher since the rain, and Dick had to carry over his two smallest brothers.

They had been gone a good minute before she closed and barred the door. She lit no candle, either, that night, but she sat in the dark kitchen, and now and then, hopefully, she would go into her father's room and listen.

"Dad," she would say quietly.

But he did not answer her all night long; and dawn, coming at last, discovered her with tired, shadowed eyes, still sitting in the kitchen. . . .

She had never seen him before.

He came walking down through the clearing, a tall shambling man, carrying a rifle and an Indian hatchet, and stood outside the door.

"This here is Gordon's clearing?" he asked.

"Yes, Mister," Maggie said.

She stood at the entrance, struggling to keep her face quiet.

"Will you come in and sit down?"

She felt that she had to ask.

"No." He shook his head. He had a slight cast in one eye. "Where's Gordon?"

He had a sly, calculating face, and his eyes kept roving. She felt suddenly afraid that he might find out Gordon's helplessness.

"My father'll be here pretty soon," she said, wondering whether her face showed a lie as plainly as Dick's would. "Will you wait for him?"

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The man ran his hand round inside the sweaty band of his hat. He had black hair on a narrow head, and his eyes never stopped their hunting here and there about the place. "You Gordon's daughter?" he asked.

"Yes, Mister."

"Maggie Gordon?"

"Yes."

"Know a man named David Murray?"

"Yes," she said again, wonderingly.

"I guess this is the place. I don't know the country very good." He seemed to mouth his words a little. "Seen airy Indian round here, lately?"

"No," said Maggie. "There's been nobody but yourself, Mister."

"That's queer." He looked sharply at her with his straight-seeing eye. "Murray sent one of his Indian scouts this way two days ago. Cataroque and Hess left him at the Canada Crick. He ain't come back."

"Is David Murray round here?" Maggie asked.

"Back north." He pointed a thumb. "Casselman and him have got a bunch of us. We're striking for a place called Reeber's between here and Fairfield." He grinned, showing brown teeth that stuck out slightly. "But Murray says to me, Ike, if you see Gordon's girl, you tell her not to be scared."

"Are you alone?" Maggie asked, the color rising in her face.

"Yes. But I was to tell Gordon to get out. Murray said so."

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"Well, I'll tell him when he comes," Maggie said, not knowing why she continued to distrust him, because, after all, the man was from David Murray. Perhaps it was because she did not want him to know that she had misled him. Or maybe it was this furtiveness in his eyes. At any rate, she was glad to see him go, which he did, with a grin and a sidelong stare over his shoulder.

He passed down to the beginning of the Jerseyfield road and bent down over the tracks of Mount's cart, picking up some horse droppings in his hand. Then he turned suddenly and crossed the ford towards Mount's. Just before he entered the woods the sun glanced like a spark on the edge of the little axe.

Maggie returned slowly to the kitchen.

"Maggie."

She gave a glad cry, "Dad!" and hurried in to the bedroom.

His eyes met hers as if he saw her.

"What was that?"

"A man called Ike. David Murray, he was one of the men with Casselman that night, sent him to say we weren't to be worried. Oh, Dad."

"What's happened to me?"

Her mention of Murray obviously made no impression on him.

"You've been sick, Dad. You'll be better now," she said. For the time it seemed to her that all her worries were coming to an end.

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"I can't move my right arm," he said. "I can move my leg only a little on that side."

"You've been sick," she repeated. "Adam's coming back tomorrow. We'll move you down to the Valley where a doctor can look out for you."

He said, "My bed's in a mess," fretfully, and Maggie flushed with shame.

"Oh, Dad, I'll fix it right away."

She managed to get him off the blankets and onto the floor, where he sat with his head against the bed. He seemed exhausted by her labor, and just lay there, while she turned the tick and smoothed out the blankets. Then it took all the strength she had to get him back again.

He lay still for a while with closed eyes and she thought that he had gone to sleep. But suddenly he feebly put his left hand out, took hers, and squeezed it very faintly.

"This is a good time for me to get sick, isn't it?"

His voice had no strength, but the way he spoke heartened her immeasurably.

"You go to sleep," she said.

When she returned to the kitchen she saw with eyes that were amazed that it looked dirty, and realized that for two days she had not touched a broom. She smiled to herself, calling herself lazy. While she swept and sanded the floor, she hummed a tune. She was half through before she remembered what the words were that went with it.

"With his golden hair a-curling and his
Feather in the sky. . . ."

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It came to her that all along she had been putting dependence in the hope that David Murray would look in again some day. And now he was in the woods to the north; even the fact that the looks of the man, Ike, had been so disquieting could not alter that fact. It was a thing no man could help, in war, she supposed—the company he had to go with.

A little later her father woke again and asked for some food and drink. He grumbled when she brought him warmed milk, but he drank the cupful, admitting that it made him feel better. She promised to bring him some mush in a while.

She gave him the corn mush at noon. He fell asleep before she had finished spooning the stuff into his mouth; and it seemed to her that his face had lost some of its bluish tinge.

After she had fed herself on what remained of the mush, she went outdoors, carrying the musket, and made the circuit of the clearing.

There was nothing to see, beyond the place at which the man named Ike had entered the clearing on the western side. He had evidently been following the water, and she wondered where he had come from. There must be a camp somewhere westward; there was a trail, she knew, that struck from the West Canada ford to Black River.

Returning along the creek, she went as far as the eastern end of the clearing, opposite the ford to Mount's place. From that point a person could see their entire farm, the entrance of the road, the barn, the house, the hemlocks round the

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spring, the mill, and the length of the creek, the water dancing down the rifts with a bright spatter cresting the dark blue.

The woods on the hills showed a wind blowing, but in the clearing it was hardly felt. The sun had a clear, light warmth of September. The windy blue sky and the small sailing clouds were like bits of the vast white ones of summer.

The pattern of the wind in the leaves was the only moving thing that Maggie saw in all the woods. They gave no sign of life other than the swinging of the branches. They seemed aloof from all this business of war, as if in their almost limitless distances so small a thing as death could leave no mark upon them. Often enough Maggie had seen a hawk strike into that sea of green; in the first year of their coming she had heard wolves running late in the fall; once she had even seen one cross the western end of the clearing; but the wilderness always absorbed them and their business; always when she looked again there was the same unbroken sea of treetops, as if the wilderness were waves endlessly rolling down upon the clearing from the north and west. Now, as she turned her eyes back to the house, it seemed a tiny, new square box, set up in the fingers of the woods. Her eyes brimmed suddenly as she thought that a still smaller square, inside that box, was her father's room, where he lay helpless.

What had made her start along the creek path further eastward, she never knew; she had certainly no clear idea

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of fetching in the horses; and as soon as she had gone well into the woods she felt their stillness. The wind in the tree-tops was like a curtain shutting down the world. Underneath it anything might shape its being unobserved of heaven.

When the fear first struck her, she stopped a while to listen. It seemed to her that lately not her ears alone but all her senses had been keyed to listen with. There was a feeling in her that if she listened hard enough, she would surely hear the cowbell somewhere in the woods; and then she would know enough to turn and run for home.

But there was no sound. The cowbell, by Adam Dingman's advice, had been hung on the kitchen wall. She told herself that she was being silly. Adam would be returning tomorrow, perhaps even tonight, and they would take her father out, and if they did, they would need the horses. She had seen neither of them for the past two days.

The trail was a narrow path, kept open by Brownie and the horses, and meandering along the bank of the stream. Now and then it branched round little islands of undergrowth, as if the animals continually experimented to find easier going. Though there seemed no reason for these cranks and turns, for the most part they managed to seek out the levellest going.

Maggie scarcely expected to find the team in the beaver fly where they grazed for most of the summer. But on pushing through the dense wall of goldenrod and asters that fringed it, she saw both the horses peacefully feeding in the open.

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They were, as a matter of fact, nearly at the far side from her, standing knee-deep in the beaver grass, under the shadow of a sailing cloud. As it passed them over and sprang up the distant wall of leaves and slid away, their hides shone with sudden brilliance in the sunlight.

The old horse was a black, with grey rims round his eyes, and badger muzzle; but the younger, which was her father's special pride, was a dark bay, a smallish, slat-ribbed animal, with straight forelegs, and a long neck and head. He was not as good a work horse as the other, but under saddle he was supposed to have a first-rate burst of speed. Maggie had always considered him a very handsome horse. She made a pet of him. Sometimes he would answer her when she whistled.

She thought of trying him now, for if he answered, she would avoid having to venture into the open. Then she noticed that he had lifted his head. He stayed like a statue watching over his shoulder. Suddenly, he snorted like a deer, gathered his haunches under him, and sprang away from the woods.

The old black skittishly caught flight, without ever glancing to see what it was, kicked up his heels, and whinnied as the two raced down the beaver fly. They did not stop for Maggie, but plunged headlong into the trail, obviously enjoying the run, now, in spite of their original fright.

Maggie was too surprised to try to stop them. She could not imagine what had set them off. There had been no panther for some time in their woods. Adam claimed to have shot the last one in Jerseyfield two years ago. And

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wolves would not be wandering down for at least another month.

Instinctively she crouched in the goldenrod. The impulse to follow the horses was strong, but she realized that to do so would show her presence to whatever had stampeded the team.

She had only a short wait before she saw it. It was a foxy-looking Indian dog. His ears were pointed as he came out of the trees, his sharp nose tilted upward. She had only a glimpse of his sandy-white coat before he vanished into the grass. Then in a moment he jumped up on an old stump and balanced himself to look across the meadow. She could see the hair on the side of his neck roughed by a puff of wind.

For a breath she thought that he must have scented her. But a whistle from the woods distracted him. He turned his head, looked back towards her once more, and then, at another whistle, dropped off out of sight.

As soon as he was gone, she scrambled up and ran into the trail. She followed the horse tracks at a run almost the full quarter mile to their own clearing. There, as she came out of the woods, she saw the team standing by the barn, each muzzling the other's shoulder, as peacefully as if they had been there all day.

She hurried to them, drove them into their stalls and haltered them. Then, at last, she leaned herself against the stable wall and fought for her breath.

The sound of the whistle, more than the horses' fright, or the sight of the dog, had unnerved her. It had made her

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think at once of the Indian ringing the cowbell up on the ridge, waiting for one of them to fetch the cow. What the man named Ike had said that morning no longer comforted her. What he had said alluded to the Fairfield men, but it did not take in Indians, and she had, instead of George Mount's confidence, an instinctive fear of them. The dog had been an Indian dog, by the very look of him. The whistle must have been an Indian's.



7. *Cataroque and Hess*

SHE forced herself to be quiet, and after she returned to the kitchen, when her father heard her and called out, "Where've you been, Maggie?" she answered in what seemed a tolerable voice, "Fetching in Prince and Blackie, Dad."

He said, "I heard them coming home. They sounded as if they were running."

"Yes," she said, "they're feeling frisky."

She went in to him then with some water.

"How are you, Dad?"

"I'm not much good, I guess. But I feel easier. I can't seem to move my arm at all, though."

"You will, soon, Dad."

"Didn't you say that Adam Dingman was coming back here?"

"Yes. I told you. He's coming back tomorrow."

Her father smiled thinly.

"Well, Maggie, I won't raise any more fuss about going." He let his head lie back upon the pillow. "We'll take what

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we can with us. But you'll have to pack, Maggie."

"Yes, Dad." She watched him try to smile. "The china pot," she said. "And the good cups in their box and my small loom."

He nodded wearily. "Whatever you think. And don't forget the satchel I've got under the front of Brownie's stall. There's not much money in it, but enough to start us off down there. Pack it in one of the trunks, Maggie."

"Yes, Dad."

"I think I'll have another nap," he said. "It's about all I can do nowadays."

"Yes," she said. "You do. . . ."

Packing was something to keep her mind busy. She brought down the little cowhide trunk from the loft and set it in the middle of the kitchen. There were her own things to put in it, her shoes, and her new white stockings, her best petticoat and short gown, a lawn cap and a fancy chintz pocket, the locket that had been her mother's in a small rosewood box together with some silver buckles and a brooch, and last, her mother's wedding dress.

They comforted her; they were things that she knew; they had been before her time. She fetched the Bible and the book of Martyrs and placed them in the bottom of the trunk. It was while she was looking for a place for the little bag of money that she heard Dick coming.

He walked in hurriedly.

"Hello, Maggie. What you doing?"

"Packing my things," she said mechanically. Then she

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rose quickly from her knees. "Oh, Dick," she whispered. "I'm glad you're here. Come outside."

They stood together by the door. The wind had strengthened, it blew about them both, fluttering her petticoat to touch Dick's legs.

"What is it, Maggie?"

Briefly she told him first about the man called Ike, and then about fetching in the horses, the dog, and the whistle. He watched her all the time with his steady brown eyes, then he turned his thin face eastward, so that she saw his jawbone, and the sensitive lean curve of his lips.

He said quietly, "That took nerve, Maggie."

She flushed all over.

"I was scared half to death, Dick."

"I would have been, too."

"Do you s'pose it was an Indian?"

"Maybe so. I'm not bothered about Indians. It's the notion of these Fairfield men."

"Why, Dick. How can you say so?"

"They hate Pa," he said. "And we hate them. We always have. If the Indians do anything, it will be because Casselman got them to."

He stood a long while thinking. And for once Maggie was not impatient with him for his slowness.

All at once it seemed to her that the world was going wrong entirely, she did not know why it should seem so, but it did; she did not understand the war or what made people fight or feel afraid. But she felt that whatever was to be done could be safely left to Dick. Standing there with

his hair all tousled by the wind, he looked no longer like a boy.

"How's your Pa today?"

"He seems better."

"Is he fit to ride?"

"In the cart?"

"Yes, of course," he said shortly.

Feeling that she had said something stupid, Maggie answered meekly, "I think so, Dick."

"All right. I'm going back to fetch the boys. I'll bring them over here tonight. Then we'll decide. If Adam hain't come early, we'll maybe leave ourselves after dark."

"Dick, have you seen anything?"

"No, Maggie. But I get a feeling over there that somebody's been watching. I can't find the tracks. It's just the feeling. I'm scary as a girl about it. I guess it's Pa and Ma both being away just now that makes me feel so."

His eyes avoided hers.

"I know." She nodded her head, so that the two braids twitched on her back. "But maybe it's not so bad."

"You mean about the man called Ike and this feller David Murray?"

"I was thinking so."

"I was myself," he said. "Didn't he say that that Indian was one of Murray's scouts?"

Maggie nodded again.

"But there's no doubt that Indian wanted to get you or your Dad out."

She realized that he said it without any malice; it made

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her heart warm to Dick. He wasn't trying to run down anybody; he was merely stating the obvious fact.

"Yes," she said timidly.

"You see, Maggie, I don't know this feller Murray. Maybe he's all right. No doubt he is. But there's people hate us, even if he don't. I'll fetch the boys."

"Won't your Pa get mad at you for that?"

"Pa's getting mad don't matter now," Dick said. "He told us to thresh out the peas. Well, George and Henry are finishing them with Turp right now. That's why I came over."

"Yes, Dick."

"You get all packed. What are you taking, by the way?"

"Just the trunk and some little things and my small loom."

"Don't take too much. We may have to travel fast." He stopped for a last moment. "Maggie," he said, "that surely was a fine thing, getting in the horses."

He did not look at her as he left, and he went hurriedly.

By the time he had gone, the sun was low. With a last look out of doors, Maggie returned to her work. There wasn't much left to do. By twilight she had finished, had started supper, and was milking Brownie in the barn.

It was an odd thing to think that she might not milk Brownie again for a while. She realized that they would have to leave the old cow to fend for herself or follow at her own pace if she could. Knowing Brownie's lazy disposition, the last seemed unlikely.

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As she helped her father with his supper she told him of Dick's plans. He nodded from time to time.

"Yes, maybe we'd better figure on meeting Adam. You'll have to help me dress, though."

She did that, holding his trousers for him over the edge of the bed. It was an awkward business. The right leg moved a little to his wish, but the arm was still useless. He said somewhat shyly, looking up at her, "You'll have to take care of the old man for a while, I'm afraid."

"Don't say so, Dad."

It was evident that he felt a sense of shame at having needed help to dress.

"I'd better rest while I can," he said.

"Poor Dad," she thought, returning to the kitchen. "He doesn't complain at all. Just imagine how George Mount would act if he was sick this way."

She went to the door.

The sun had set and a pale green twilight hung above the western woods, making the pointed tips of balsams wild and lonely. The wind was going down. The creek had a brittle sound, as if the banks were feeling frost.

Behind her in the barn the horses stamped the floor and shook their halters.

"It'll be cold tonight," she thought.

She went back into the kitchen and looked at the heap she had made of their possessions in the middle of the floor. She had not appreciated before how insignificant the pile would seem. The walls in the dusk had an odd look of bareness. There was a pathetic sense of emptiness in the house,

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as if already it were aware of their desertion; as if, the way some persons did, it had aged suddenly.

The sky darkened swiftly with the fading of the green twilight and the rounding surface of the moon changed color from its first full yellow to a chilled whiteness. With the cessation of the wind it seemed to sail surprisingly. The night became still.

In the bedroom Maggie heard her father's steady breathing.

*"Heavenly angels round my head,
Please to watch me in my bed,
If in sleeping I should die,
Lift my soul to God on high."*

The words of the childish prayer popped into her head unexpectedly. The comfort of their recollection filled her eyes.

Maggie was still quiet from her thought of the prayer when she heard someone crying softly.

"Keep still." It was Dick's voice. "That's a good boy. Keep still. Do you want Maggie Gordon to see you crying that way?"

"Dick!" she said and hurried to the door.

They came into the darkness together from the white dimness of the moonlight, their two figures like shadows of themselves. Dick, and the small fat shape of Cobus.

"Where's George and Henry and Turp?" she asked, closing them into the blackness with her. Then, hearing the

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sniffing continue and the heavy breathing of Dick, "What's happened? Oh, Dick!"

"Maggie, we've got to have a light."

His voice was unnaturally dry.

"Yes," she whispered, "just a minute. There ought to be coals left."

"No, no! Not yet. Have you got anything to hang over the window?"

She handed him a blanket which he draped over the pane. In another instant she was bending at the hearth, raking aside the ashes with stupid fingers, and blowing on a coal. The flame was born on the end of the candlewick, climbed feebly, and burned. She rose with it, facing the sound of Cobus' sniffing.

The little fat boy was standing on the floor, holding one arm across his eyes against the light. The other arm hung down stiff and straight in the tattered shirt-sleeve. Maggie caught her breath to see it sopping and dark.

Dick was already bending down beside his brother.

"It's only a small one."

"What happened, Dick?"

"They took a shot at us when we was pulling foot for the woods."

"Was it Indians?"

He nodded. "Hess and Cataroque."

"They did?"

"Yes," he said. "Got anything to tie this up?"

She stripped a piece of cotton from the cloth she had used to cover the yet open trunk, and stooped beside Dick.

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Cobus, with blubbering lips, turned his face hesitantly and looked down his shoulder at himself.

"That's a good boy, Cobus," said Dick. "Don't you cry. You come along fine."

Maggie glanced at Dick. His face was drawn and still. There was only a kind of dull disbelief that still covered his eyes. At his direction, she held one end of the rough bandage.

"I thought they'd killed him, too," said Dick. "He'd sneaked out of the barn to lay down, the way he always does. I'd just got there when I heard Turp yell in the barn. Then Cobus got up from back of the manure pile and Hess come out with his axe." He stared at Maggie. "I knew then there wasn't anything to do. I yelled to Cobus and he came running to me."

"What happened to George and Henry, Dick?" Maggie, too, felt the same strange incredulity.

"I guess they must be dead. Turp, too, I guess."

Suddenly Maggie realized that little Cobus was trying to say something.

"What is it, Cobus?"

He was still looking down at himself, at the bandage that pressed into his plump brown arm.

His lips repeated the words, but she could not understand them.

"What is it, Cobus?" Dick asked.

"It's my own private swear," said Cobus. "I never tell it to no one at all."

Suddenly he began to cry.

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"Be still," said Dick sternly, but his voice wasn't rough. "You're doing fine, Cobus."

"When did it happen?" Maggie asked.

"Just as quick as I got there. Cobus, had Hess and Cata-roue been round before I came?"

Cobus nodded.

"Yes, they came in and set down, watching us thresh. They was asking about Pa and Ma and where they was. They asked where you was. I got tired talking and went out back. Then I heard Turp holler and I woked up and Hess was coming after me. And then Dick yelled."

His eyes were solemn.

"I was scared."

Dick stared at him, then turned to Maggie.

"I waited a while with Cobus. He didn't holler, in spite of the hurt. Then we seen a couple of white men come into the clearing from the west. They went into the barn. After that I cleared out."

"What are they going to do?"

"I don't know. I want to see your Pa."

He took the candle and went into her father's room. Maggie followed and Cobus crowded close to her. Putting her hand on the little boy's shoulder, she felt that he was still blubbering to himself.

"Mister Gordon," said Dick. "You'll have to get ready to move."

Gordon woke, looked up at the three white, staring faces, and said, "All right, Dick." Then he, too, asked, "What's happened?"

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Dick told him in a few words. He still spoke with the dry disbelief in his voice, as if he were half-asleep.

Gordon listened quietly.

Then he said, "All right. We'll have to go right now." He smiled weakly at them. "I'm no good. No good at all. It's up to you and Maggie, Dick. Don't hurry too fast."

"I'll hitch the team now," said Dick. "Maggie, you get everything to the door."

With Cobus tugging nobly, Maggie dragged the trunk outside. "We'll leave the loom," she said.

"Gosh," said Cobus. He was becoming interested in the proceedings. He turned to Maggie with round eyes. "Say, Maggie, do you believe Henry and George and Turp got scalped?"

"I don't know."

She could hardly think. In the barn she heard the jingle of harness and the tread of the horses coming out. She heard the tongue of the cart being put into the yoke-ring.

"I'll bet they did," said Cobus. "Hess showed me how to do it once."

"Hush up," she said.

He began to sniffle again.

"My arm hurts," he said.

"Yes, I know. You're a good boy."

They made no effort now at concealment. Dick brought the cart round into the light, before the door.

"We'll have to hurry," he said.

With Maggie and Cobus struggling at one end, the three heaved the trunk into the cart. Then she and Dick went in

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for her father. Already he had worked his feet off the bed himself. Putting his arms over their shoulders, he stood up between them.

"Now," he said, "we'll just take it easy. And we'll go fine."

Maggie's heart swelled at his voice. He was comforting them more than anyone else could have, sick as he was.

They helped him to the tail of the cart, where he stood with his good arm bracing himself. Dick bent down behind him and caught both legs below the knees, heaved suddenly, and thrust him forward into the cart.

"Get on, Cobus," he ordered.

While Cobus climbed on, Maggie drew herself up over the wheel and turned her father on his back on top of the blankets. Dick handed her his squirrel gun and the Gordons' musket, caught up the reins, and jumped onto the seat.

For one instant he poised there, looking north towards his home.

A redness that did not belong to the moonlight was spreading slowly above the trees. As they watched, it leaped skyward, and a great cloud of sparks whirled after it.

"They've set fire to the wheat stack," Dick said dully.

"Yes," said Maggie.

"Yes," echoed Cobus.

"We'd better start," Gordon said quietly.

Dick struck the horses with the ends of the lines. Already restless over the unaccustomed hour, the sight of fire, and the smell of frost, they plunged into their collars. The cart

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lurched up and down on its single axle, then settled to a steady jogging. The rumble of the big wheels filled all the night.

As she sat on the floor beside her father, Maggie turned her head for a farewell sight of their own place. The buildings shone dimly in the moonlight. She picked out each; the mill, with the water silver in the little pond beside it; the barn with its log walls; the house.

They had left the candle burning in the kitchen. For a little way after the horses had trotted into the woods she saw that square of yellow light beyond the leaves.



8. *Flight*

DRIVING with no light, they had to trust in the horses' knowledge of the road. Dick kept them at a slow trot. They had twenty miles to go, unless it happened that Adam Dingman had already started up from the Falls, and that seemed unlikely.

For the first mile the road went southeastward out of Black Creek Valley, at a slight angle to the creek; then it swung almost due south across the uplands. Here the woods dwindled into scrub-growth, poplar and soft maple, and occasional ragged birch clumps. As the road became more level, the stones disappeared from the wheel tracks, and Dick pushed the horses into a faster pace.

The moon by now had sunk low in the west, lying almost on the tops of the trees, and giving them little light. There were only the stars overhead. As she sat in the bottom of the cart, Maggie could see Dick's head and shoulders, jiggling past them to the motion of the cart.

Her father lay without speaking. It was impossible to tell whether he was awake or had fainted or gone once more

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into that deathlike coma. In any case, there was nothing that she could do.

With Cobus, it was different. The little fat boy had crept close up to her and nestled himself against her arm. At first he whimpered when a particularly hard jolt hurt his arm, and she stroked his round cheek with her free hand. Now and then she felt tears on her hand and heard him sniffing softly, and she lowered her face close to his ear and whispered, "That's a brave boy, Cobus. That's a fine brave boy."

"Yes," he said. He lifted his face suddenly and put a wet kiss on her cheek, and she was so moved that she kissed him back, bumping her nose as the cart bucketed into a pothole in the sand. He snuggled down then to hide his face in her lap, blushing, though it was too dark for anyone to see him, because he thought, "Now I've gone and kissed a girl!"

Still muttering, he fell asleep.

Along the first straight stretch, Dick screwed round, first glancing down into the box of the cart, then staring back. Looking up at his thin face, outlined darkly against the sky, Maggie tried to read his thoughts. But that was hard in the darkness, with the jiggling of the cart.

"Do you see anything, Dick?" she asked.

His face bent down.

He whispered, "I think they've set fire to your place, too."

"Oh, no!"

"I can see two lights and they look too far apart to both

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be on our place."

It was not that she had had any idea of their coming back to Black Creek so much as the memory of all they had had to leave behind that so dismayed her.

"Shhh! Don't let him hear."

"I'm afraid it's true, though, Maggie."

"Why?" she cried. "Why do they have to do it, Dick?"

"Why'd they have to kill George and Henry?" he asked stonily.

"Oh Dick!" After a little, when he had turned back to watch the road ahead, "Maybe they didn't kill them, Dick."

He didn't answer her.

She put Cobus carefully down beside her father and pulled herself erect, standing unsteadily, even though she grasped the side of the box with both hands.

Their progress seemed quicker when she could see the road unravelling behind the wheels, instead of the treetops against the sky; and the spot of redness in the north looked far behind them. But there was another spot now, close to the left of the first. So close, indeed, that she could hardly believe it came from their own clearing. And she said so.

Dick replied softly that if both fires were on the Mount place, the two spots, at that distance, would look like one. They must be quite a way apart, therefore, and what other place was there to be burnt?

Maggie felt that what he said was true.

It was strange to think how Mount and her father had cut this road out nearly four years ago. How everything that made their clearings home, how they themselves had

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travelled in along this route that they were fleeing over. The tools, the cows, the saws and mill machinery, the seeds, and, just this fall, the two stones for the gristmill. Gordon and Mount had brought them in less than two months ago; now they would never eat any of their own gristing. By this time all the wheat on Mount's place would have been burned. There would be nothing left, except in two years, maybe, raspberries would be growing in the clearings. But there would be nobody to pick raspberries.

"Dick?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do you think your Pa and Ma will be coming back?"

"I guess Adam will have seen them down in Little Falls. He'll tell them."

She moved cautiously forward so that she could lean her arms over the back of the seat.

The horses had begun to sweat. Dick eased them down to a walk for the next quarter of a mile. The slowness of the pace got on Maggie's nerves. She kept turning her head.

"Do you think it's all right to walk them so long?"

"Old Blackie's breathing too hard. I never thought he had sound wind. You can see he hasn't."

"Yes, but Dick. They might be coming after us?"

"I shouldn't wonder, if they figure out what a short start we had," he said.

She looked back for a long time. There was nothing to see except the dim straight line of the road, with its point of vanishment that steadily followed their progress.

"Twenty miles is a long way," Dick said.

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Maggie did not comment again. But after a little she began to count. She would count up to a hundred slowly, she thought, then she would suggest again that the horses trot—if Dick hadn't started them by that time.

She reached a hundred, and looked up at him. It was still hard for her to speak of it. He made her a little afraid of him, the way he sat, so set and quiet, on the seat.

"Dick," she said finally.

"Yes."

"Don't you think Blackie's rested enough now?"

He turned his head to her upturned face.

"Who's driving? You? Or me?"

She lowered her face, feeling almost as if he had struck her.

"I get so scared," she whispered.

"Do you think I ain't?" he demanded harshly. He gave a small, cracked-sounding laugh.

"I get the feeling when we walk the horses that they're close behind us."

"So do I. Maybe they are. But there's no sense breaking down the horses. *He* can't walk, you know," Dick said.

"I know, but . . ."

"If you want to drive, say so. Get up here and take the lines."

"I don't want to drive, Dick. You know a lot better than me. Honest you do."

"Well." He sounded slightly mollified. "I'll let them go again when we get through the holler."

The small heads of the team dipped down and the cart

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wheels whispered through deep sand. They pitched into the blackness and forded a tiny brook. They could not see the water, but they heard the horses splash through, and then the team dug into their collars and heaved up the further bank, their heads working up and down like hammers.

"All right," said Dick. He clucked his tongue and shook the reins and the team trotted willingly.

For a way there was only the tread of hoofs and the steady trundling of the big, loose wheels. The air was quite frosty. Maggie muffled her shawl close round her neck. Her face peeped out from it, pale and appealing, beside Dick's shoulder. He was conscious of its nearness, even while he kept his eyes glued to a point between the horses' ears. He could see little enough, but he tried to look for potholes. There was one bad one, he knew from what his father had said, between the gully they had just come through and Reeber's Settlement. It had come into the sand since the last time he himself had been over the road, and he wished now mightily, that he had paid closer attention when his father mentioned it.

Maggie could only make out the willing backs of the horses, but she felt her heart warm to them. They went so honestly. Surely it seemed that they would fetch the cart through to the Mohawk.

"Dick," she said softly, "have you thought what your family's going to do?"

"No."

"You don't think they'll go back to Jerseyfield, do you?"

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"Not if it's burnt. Pa'll have to go to work. They say work's hard to come by now down there." He paused. "I reckon," he added, "I'll have to go to work, too."

"I don't know what we'll do," said Maggie. "Dad won't be able to do much of anything for quite some time, I think."

"Maybe you could stay with us," he said, shyly.

"Oh, thank you, Dick. But we don't know yet what's going to be."

"No," he said moodily.

"It seems as if I was dreaming," Maggie said.

"I know. It's going to be queer not having George and Henry."

"Yes," she whispered. "Poor things."

She felt him shiver.

"What's the matter, Dick?"

His voice was painfully low.

"I just recollected about Turp," he said. "I never thought of him at all."

She caught her breath.

"Poor Turp."

"He never was any good for anything. He was even smarter than Cobus when it came to dodging work. But he never done any harm beyond taking things, and he couldn't just help that."

"Yes, I know. I heard him telling your Pa once—there were the blueberry tarts, and there was his stomach with the hunger in it just for blueberries. And his hands just did it 'fore he knew."

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"Let's not talk about him, Maggie."

"All right, Dick."

They were silent for another mile, then Dick slowed down the team again.

"You'd better take a look at your Pa, hadn't you?"

When she bent down she realized how stiff she was from standing in the cold. She could not see her father, so she put her hand on his chest, lightly, feeling him breathe.

"Hello, Maggie," he said.

"You're all right, Dad?"

"Yes, but hush. The little lad's asleep."

Cobus, lying on his unhurt side, was snoring in a muffled sort of way, his nose against Gordon's coat.

"How far've we come?" Gordon whispered.

"I'll ask Dick."

Dick answered, "I don't know. I think about four miles."

"We ought to be out of reach of them, anyway," Gordon said.

"I guess so, Mister Gordon. But I'll feel better once we get past Reeber's."

"Dick!" said Maggie.

She hadn't thought of that.

Gordon agreed with Dick. "Yes, I've been thinking that's the first place Suffrenes Casselman would head for."

"Pa says that all the people there have gone," Dick said. "But Casselman wouldn't know that."

Gordon fell silent. And Maggie stood up again, to lean on the seat beside Dick.

"Dick, what will we do, if they're there?"

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"I don't know yet. There's no road around we could take the cart through. Maybe they won't be there."

She felt that he was lying to her.

"You think they will, though, don't you?"

"I don't know," he said crossly. "What's the use of talking?"

She thought his voice had a teary sound, unlike himself. It made her understand how much more awful things must seem to him.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "I'll bet you'll get us through all right. I'm not worried myself at all. With you along." And she added what was the plain truth in her heart, "Just think of how it would have been for me and Dad without you to look after us."

He didn't answer; but now that the fact had occurred to her, she began to remember how she had thought of Dick as just a boy. She remembered what she had said to him that afternoon in the creek, when they were waiting for their fathers to bring home the millstones.

"Dick," she whispered. "Do you remember what I said to you once, about you being 'most a man'?"

"You didn't think I'd forget that, did you?"

It was hard to say what she wished to, and she felt her breath flutter a little.

"I'd like to say, Dick, that outside of Dad, I think you are the best man I ever heard of."

He sat quite still, as if he hadn't heard her at all. For a minute she was sure he hadn't.

"It's true," she said in a hot small voice, "the way you

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came around looking after us, and helped us with our wheat, and killed that pig for me. I never noticed," she said wonderingly. "I didn't think, I guess. And then the way you got us out of there tonight."

"Well," he said, in a voice that belied all her saying, "I ain't any older than I was, respecting you."

But Maggie was too convinced, too proud of him, as if she had just discovered who he was, to pay attention.

"I don't think how old a person is has anything to do with what he really is himself."

Dick spoke to the horses, because he could think of nothing to say to her.

"Don't you think I'm right, Dick?"

"I don't know. I don't see how you can talk all the time, now, anyway."

She thought he must be thinking of George and Henry, and she felt ashamed of her self-preoccupation. But with a remnant of her father's stubbornness she said, "I just wanted to tell you, Dick."

After a while, he said, "Thanks."

But she kept silence, feeling a little hurt, and feeling also that she had been wrong, and that any way he treated her now would be fair punishment.

The result was that they hit the pothole at full trot; the horses, without Dick's attention to the lines, never saw it at all, until Blackie struck the soft spot with his nigh fore-hoof, went down on his knees in the sand, kicked himself up with a lurch against the collar just as the wheel went down. The cart veered sickeningly over and bounced out,

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almost losing the wheel in the process. Cobus woke screaming under Gordon, and Dick, held on only by Maggie's instinctive grabbing of his belt to save herself, yanked the team savagely to a halt.

He didn't need to treat them roughly. Old Blackie had gone dead lame. Once he stopped, he could not set his nigh forehoof to the ground.

Dick jumped out of the cart to look him over, and Maggie, after reassuring herself about her father and Cobus, climbed down and joined him.

He was standing close to Blackie with his forehead against the horse's withers.

"How is he, Dick?"

"He's gone dead lame."

She could scarcely hear his voice.

"I don't believe he's broke his leg, but he can't use it at all."

"What will we do?" she whispered.

"I don't know."

In the cart Gordon heaved himself up to a semi-upright position, and leaned over the edge of the box.

"What's the trouble, Dick?"

"Blackie hit a sinkhole, and he's spoilt his nigh foreleg."

Her father did not comment. Dick looked miserably at him, and Maggie looked at Dick.

Little Cobus stood up on the seat and looked down at everybody. In the dark he might have been his father turned into a gnome.

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"I'd call it dumb bad driving. Gosh, Dick, what was you thinking about? Or was you just plain crazy in the head?"

Dick let his temper go at last. He did not look at Maggie, as he stepped towards the cart. "You hush up right now, Cobus, or I'll *handle* you."

Cobus shrank back.

"You can't," he said. "I been hurt by Indians. You can't do that."

"You hush your mouth then."

"I will," said Cobus with unusual judiciousness.

Gordon said, "I can't get down by myself. So I'll stay here while we decide. One thing's sure, we can't take the cart. Even if Prince could handle it, there's no way to rig it to his harness in a hurry."

"I know," said Dick. "If I'd just been paying attention to the road, I'd seen him go down and might have hauled him up in time."

"It was my fault," said Maggie.

He whirled on her.

"It's no use talking that way."

"No," said Gordon. "None at all. There's just one thing to do. You drag me into the bushes for a way, and I'll lay low. Then you three youngsters get on Prince and ride for all you're worth." He drew his breath. "When they find the cart and see the tracks, they'll figure out what's happened and won't look around any. You can tell Adam or anybody coming up where I am."

"I'll stay with you, Dad," said Maggie.

"You'll not."

F L I G H T

"No," said Dick, "she'll not. And I won't go if she does stay. So there's no sense arguing, Mr. Gordon. You'll get on Prince with Cobus and Maggie and we'll light out that way. I'll tie you on. And Maggie can help steady you. Maybe it's just as well. Maybe we'll have to get round Reeber's in the woods, and then we'd have to leave the cart anyway."

Maggie said, "Yes, Dad. We couldn't leave you." It seemed to her that Dick thought everything out.

Gordon said, "You're a good lad, Dick. All right. I'll take orders. Bring Prince round here."

Dick unhitched the pair, but he left Prince's harness on. It offered Maggie and Cobus things to hang to, and it would make tying Gordon's legs easier. While Maggie held the horse's head, he helped Gordon off the cart onto the animal's back. Then he tied Gordon's knees to the belly-band and joined the ankles underneath with one of the reins.

He gave Maggie a boost up behind her father. She put her arms round his waist and took the reins.

"It's like an arm chair," Gordon said. "Wait, Dick, could you hop into the cart and get my little satchel? Where is it, Maggie?"

"Right at the top of the trunk."

Dick opened the trunk and, after some fumbling, found the satchel.

"It's all the money we have in the world, Maggie. Hold it safe."

"Yes, Dad."

She passed the strap over her head and felt the weight

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of the bag against her side. It amounted, she knew, to nearly thirty pounds in English money.

Dick stood for a moment in the cart, staring north.

"I guess we'd better go," he said. "Look back."

Maggie wheeled the horse for her father to see also.

From one of the conical hills way back near Black Creek a fire had been lit. It seemed to rise and fall, in a thin tongue of light. First high, then low, then just a spot, like a low-lying star, then up and down. Finally it burned in one long flare, relapsed, and disappeared.

"Indian fire," Dick said. "They're signalling. I guess there's people down in Reeber's."

They took the road.

Behind them the cart stood over the ruts, its near wheel yet on the edge of the pothole. In it were all their best possessions, even to Maggie's brand new stockings. She thought of these for just an instant, realizing that she had never really worn them. Probably now it would be years before they could afford another pair. And her mother's wedding dress, the Bible, and the box of trinkets, and the locket.

"There's one thing," said Gordon. "Don't you think we ought to get rid of Blackie?"

"He can't follow us," said Dick. "His leg's no good."

"He'll try, and he'll nicker. And Prince may nicker back."

"I just couldn't do it," Dick said. "They'll probably kill him anyway. But let him have his chance."

"All right," said Gordon.

And Maggie felt better.

Prince, with that understanding all honest horses seem



Between her arms Maggie could feel the effort her father made to keep himself upright without throwing his weight on her, or on the little boy who perched ahead of him.

FLIGHT

to have, went conscientiously, even under the unaccustomed burden of three riders. Dick walked beside his head, the musket on his arm. He had had to leave his squirrel gun in the cart.

Looking over her shoulder, Maggie saw the shadowy figure of the old black horse beside the cart. For a minute he stood still with his head lifted. Suddenly he whinnied. The sound was piercing, and to Maggie it seemed heart-rending. She saw him try to limp after them.

Under her, Prince stopped; but Dick caught hold of his headstall and yanked him forward. He did not whinny back, and after a little way, none of them could hear the old horse limping.

The road appeared to be much darker, now that they went at a walking pace and did not have the racket of the travelling cart wheels in their ears. There was nothing at all to hear except Dick's footfalls, the steady tramp of the horse, the small squeaks of harness, and their own breathing.

Between her arms Maggie could feel the effort her father made to keep himself upright without throwing his weight on her, or on the little boy, who was perched ahead of him on Prince's withers. For nearly an hour he managed to hold himself up. Then, with what sounded like a sigh, he slumped between her arms.

At first it did not seem impossible to hold him, but gradually she began to feel her back aching. She had to pull tighter and tighter on the reins to keep her hands from letting go. Prince's head came up, and after another half a

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mile he stopped.

Dick, who had been trudging a few yards ahead, came back.

"What's the matter, Maggie?"

"I just can't seem to hold Dad up any more," she answered.

"You'd better walk then. I'll get up for a while."

He jumped up behind her and she slid out through his arms as he steadied her father. She picked up the musket, and they went that way for nearly two miles more.

Then she fell back to walk beside Dick.

"What time do you think it's getting to be, Dick?"

"I don't know. I think it's getting on to five o'clock." He was watching the east. "I'd hoped we could get past Fairfield before daylight."

"Is it much farther?"

Walking, she could not see as well as he could.

"I think we're getting to it, Maggie. I guess it's about a half a mile to the top of the hill." He looked down at her. "Think you could take a spell with your Dad?"

"Yes."

Somehow Cobus was managing to keep himself on the horse, even though he slept.

Dick held Gordon on with one hand after he had dismounted and with the other made a stirrup for Maggie's bare foot.

9. *Destructives at Reeber's*

THEY went on a little way as they had before, until, without any warning, Prince's head shot up, and they reached the first downward part of the road. They knew that they were coming out above Reeber's.

In another ten minutes they reached the lip of the hill, overlooking the scattered settlement. The horse stopped instinctively.

To the east, the first faint shimmer of daylight gave an inkling of the vastness of the view; but now the length of the great valley lay in a well of darkness. Dipping into it, the road went out of sight. But a little way ahead, where Reeber's was, they saw a gathering of fires.

There must have been ten buildings burning altogether. When the fires had been at full height, they would have lit the valley for miles. By the time the two Gordons and the Mount boys came in sight of it, the timbers had all fallen in, and each house and barn was defined by masses of coals that seemed to lie in small rectangular pits. Over them smoke coiled slowly into the frosty, windless air.

Here and there among the fires, so far below as to appear

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like midget presences of men, were moving figures. Some rooted back and forth among the foundations of the buildings. One or two carried burning touches, like fireflies. Beside a well two or three men were drawing water, drinking.

Neither the men nor the place looked real. And yet the red glow under the smoke showed Maggie things she recognized—the fences edging the fields, the course of the road through the settlement, from darkness into darkness, an orchard, a safe shanty.

It all seemed senseless, without order, thought, or purpose. Just the red fires and the slowly moving figures. No sound, from where they stood, not even the smell of smoke.

Dick was breathing steadily, making a little rasping noise that Maggie could hear over the horse's breathing.

"They've burned everything," he announced. "They've even burned the woodpiles."

"Why do they do it?" Maggie asked.

"I don't know. It's crazy."

Maggie felt hushed.

"Dick," she whispered, "was your father sure all the people had gone away?"

"Yes. They'd all moved south," Dick said. "Fairfield will be the next place. There are some people of the right party there, too." He let his breath out sharply. "Ain't they *never* going to send nobody up from the Falls to stop them?" And he turned to look at her. "I don't know how we can get past," he said. "How's your Pa?"

"Just the same," she answered wearily. "I'm getting so I just don't hardly feel I can go on any more, Dick."



Here and there among the fires, so far below as to appear like midget presences of men, were moving figures. Some rooted back and forth among the foundations of the buildings. One or two carried burning torches, like fireflies.

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"You've got to." He turned back to the valley. "We can't go down the road, though. If that was a fire back of us, and they seen it, they'll be watching the road."

Maggie suddenly seemed to freeze.

"Dick! What's that they've got?"

"Where?"

"There by Reeber's house." She spoke of it as if it still stood.

Two men were prying something out of the coals with two long poles. Twice they heaved it out partway and twice it fell back with a little burst of sparks.

"You see," she said in a tightening voice. She felt ready to scream. "It's two legs."

Dick stared, as pale as she was. "I see it." There were always Indian stories. Then all at once he could tell and, he said, "It's a cow! They're roasting a cow, Maggie." And when she burst out crying, he felt the sobs climbing his own throat. It was almost funny, wanting to cry.

Yet because of the thought that they had first had, they were spellbound by the sight. One of the men who had helped drag the charred carcase out now blew a whistle. The note, so distant, was eerie-thin, with a brightness and clearness that suggested the silver that formed it.

The men left off their rummaging of the fires. Others trooped into the zone of light from south and north, where, obviously, they had been watching the road. They gathered round the carcase, worked on it with their knives, and then sat down together, in a fraternal kind of ring, like people gathered at a picnic.

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"Come on," said Dick. "This is the best chance we've got."

He took hold of Prince's bridle and led him down the road. When they came to the first pasture he pulled the rails down and turned into it, skirting the woods.

They seemed to be going down into the valley in steps, of which the pasture land and fields were the treads, and the risers were marked by strips of woodland. On the lower edge of each piece of woods they halted while Dick went ahead and scouted the next field.

To Maggie, left alone in the darkness with the horse, her father, and the little boy, hours seemed to pass each time before he returned. Her ears quickened to hear his steps, her eyes to see the first vague silhouette of his head along the fence.

When they finally reached the level of the settlement, he left her for a much longer time in a large grove of trees. At first she did not know where she was, then it came to her that this was Moyer's sugarbush and that she was not over three hundred yards from where the schoolhouse used to stand.

This time she did not see or hear Dick's return.

He said, "Maggie, it's me," in a low voice and then slipped up to the horse.

"I must have been bearing eastward without knowing it," he said. "I think we've got too close to move. I've been out to the road, and there's a man just come outside. He's standing just beyond the fence there now. He'd hear us

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sure if we moved."

"What will we do, Dick?"

"We've got to stay, that's all. You might as well get off, Maggie."

"What'll we do with Dad?"

"We'll have to leave him on. It would be too much of a job to get him up again. But we'll take Cobus off."

When he reached up for his brother, the little fat boy gave a murmuring teary sound. Dick clapped his hand over his mouth, and whispered in his ear.

Maggie felt herself turn cold, as a man's voice said incredibly near by:

"Did you hear that?"

"No," answered a second man. "What did it sound like?"

"Like something crying."

"You've got notions. Most likely it was just a cat owl."

"Maybe it was."

There was another pause.

The second man then said, "You might as well go back and get you something to eat. The old cow's tough, but she's tastier than hedgehog."

"Suffrenes told me to stay on the road."

"He won't know. The Indian's down below you, anyway. Come along."

It had sounded like Murray's voice. Maggie held her breath to listen. She heard their feet tread back along the road, then as they went, she felt sure it was he. He began to whistle:

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“’Twixt the water and the willow tree
There stood. . . .”

The second man swore. “Can’t you learn no other tune?”
Murray laughed easily.

Even in the pitch-dark, Maggie felt Dick’s eyes on her. But she could not keep herself from bending forward and starting to cry. She did not make any sound, but in her complete exhaustion of heart and body, it seemed to her that she cried for everybody. For her father, on the looming figure of the horse; he had tilted forward on the neck of the beast, and lay there unmoving. For little Cobus, with his hurt arm; for George and Henry, and the little black Turp. For their two homes and all the people of Reeber’s Settlement. For herself and David Murray, and even for old Blackie.

And after a minute, when she felt Dick put his hand on her shoulder in a tense, shy way, she cried for him, more than anyone. Dick did not say a word; but she put up her hand to catch his, and clung to it.

The horse stood still, as if he understood as well as they did the necessity for being quiet. Over their heads the branches of the old maples gradually took dim shape against the sunrise.

It was nearly half an hour after they had discovered their whereabouts when they heard a whistle blow from the settlement.

Dick went away, then, but he returned shortly to say

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that a party had come in from the Jerseyfield road. "They're standing round Casselman, talking. I guess they've heard about us."

Maggie said nothing. She had gained control of herself finally. While they stood listening, trying to hear what was happening beyond the trees, they heard a man running swiftly from the south. They had one glimpse of him in the half-light, an Indian, in leggings and skirt. They could see the blotches of paint on his face and the feather dangling from the wooden hoop round his head.

In a few minutes more they heard the whistle again. Three sharp blasts of it.

"I'm going out again to see," Dick whispered.

He slid silently away, trailing the musket. Maggie could make him out now in the gradual lightening among the old trees. His back bent tensely. He looked so thin.

As the light gathered, she heard him call her softly, and she stole forward to the edge of the sugarbush.

"They're going, Maggie."

She was surprised to see how light it had become beyond the trees. There was the promise of a fine day in the sky. The fields lay before them under a heavy wash of dew. A little beyond, on the other side of the road, where the settlement used to stand, there was nothing at all to see except the two upright posts from which the school bell still hung. The school itself had burned to the ground.

Dick was pointing.

"There they go," he said.

Maggie saw them, a knot of twenty men, or so, she could

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not tell how many. They were heading north, up the Jerseyfield road her father and Mount had made. They kept close together. Now and then one would look back. They had their rifles on their shoulders or cradled in their arms, or they carried them at trail. Their hunting shirts were blackened with soot and smoke. A little ahead of them two or three men carried blankets over their bare shoulders. One or two of them had feathers on their heads. The feathers hung limply over their ears. At the very rear, half a hundred yards behind them all, a lanky man with broad round shoulders walked. It was he who turned back oftenest.

"I guess that's Casselman," Dick said. He lifted the musket to his shoulder and took a bead on the figure. "Gosh," he said. "I wish I dasted."

He was glad that he hadn't just a minute later, for a stout, half naked Indian trotted paunchily out of the woods a little above them, entered the road, and overtook Casselman. He did not wear a feather, but an old black hat with a pointed crown. He and Casselman stood together, looking back on Fairfield. For an instant they were still in the rising light, and Maggie saw the white man's eyes move, with the light across them, so that they seemed opaque, and grey, like blind eyes. She saw his thin mouth move. Then he turned with Hess and followed the others.

As the sun warmed over the fields, the road lay empty. Only the woods rose up and up in their long slopes towards Jerseyfield.

Dick set the musket down. "They've gone," he said.

They had not made a sound, their flight seemed as sense-

less as the burning had been.

"They've got a long march to Canada," said Dick.

More than a hundred miles, however they went. Probably to Oswego, he thought.

Maggie turned her white face to his. Her hair was wet with dew, her cheeks smutted from crying. Her eyes stared almost foolishly.

"Why did they go, do you think, Dick?"

He laughed a little.

"I guess somebody's coming up at last."

Both their voices sounded queer, singing in their ears. They walked a little dizzily back to the horse, found Cobus sitting on the ground, examining his bandage; Gordon lying forward on the horse's neck, his eyes open.

They led the horse out to the road, and took Gordon down. They laid him on the ground. He could not move or speak, but he smiled at them both.

"Dick says there's men coming up the road," said Maggie, as if because Dick had said it, it was true.

The men did come.

There were thirty of them, behind Adam Dingman and a man in a brown coat with white belts crossed over his chest. His name was Ensign Petrie, from German Flats. He was the only man in uniform. The other men wore farming clothes; but they carried their guns like people who knew how to use them.

At the rear came George Mount in his cart. He had left his wife behind. He stared at Dick and then at the black-

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ened heaps of smouldering coals, as if he didn't understand.

"Where's George and Henry and Turp?" he asked.

Dick said he didn't know. He expected they were dead.

"What did you leave them for?" demanded George.
"What's the matter with Rob?"

Little Cobus looked his father in the eye. "He's sick as all get out," he said. "But I got shot."

Adam Dingman stared into Dick's drawn white face. He glanced at Maggie and her father. Maggie felt that he understood everything that had happened.

"You must have done a pretty good job, Dick," he said.

Maggie looked at Dick. All the men were looking at him. Most of them were farmers. There was a kind of heaviness in their faces, their eyes looked sleepy still, and as if they did not believe the things before them.

But one thin, ratty, black-eyed man behind Adam said, "That's right, son. Do you know who they was?"

"Casselman," answered Dick. "And Hess and Cataroque. At our place. They're the only ones I knowed."

Maggie moistened her lips.

"There was one I knew called David Murray," she said.
"And a man named Ike."

The ratty man turned quickly to her.

"What did he look like? Kind of a measly, thinnish man like me?"

"He did look something like you. He had a bad eye."

"That's Ike all right. Ike Bonny." He cursed the man.
"Excuse me, Missy. He's my brother."

Dick said wearily, "They all cleared north a little while

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afore you got here."

"We'll go after them," said Adam. "Put Gordon in Mount's cart with the girl and the boys and send them all home in it. We'll go on."

"I want to take my cart," said George. "I want to bring out stuff."

"What do you expect to find there?" Adam asked him.

A dullness came over George Mount's eyes, and his face twitched.

"I hadn't thought. I guess you're right."

The ensign then detailed two men to drive the refugees back to the Falls.



10. *Little Falls*

THEY didn't reach the Falls till afternoon. On the way they passed through Fairfield; but none of the farms had people on them. An air of desolation hung over the country; the houses were ghosts of houses, with their windows shuttered like blind eyes. A lone abandoned gander, walking from behind a barn to hiss at them, was like a ghostly bird.

But at Snyder's Bush people came out to see them and ask frightened questions; and as they heard the story a half-incredulous and almost hostile expression showed in their eyes, as if they blamed the Mounts and Gordons for this new fear. Several turned to glance at the new stockade fort they had built. It gave the settlement solidity. It had seemed to promise safety and permanence. But now that the Mount boys had been killed and the settlers had left Reeber's and come in from Fairfield, the people at Snyder's Bush saw that they had become the last outpost north of the Valley. The wilderness had moved suddenly much closer to them. The stockade was all they had between them and

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the Indians now and it no longer looked so strong.

The sky became overcast as the cart moved over the last long hills and headed downwards towards the Falls. A cold wind that had begun blowing from the west, tossed the horses' manes forward about their faces and tugged at Maggie's skirt as she stood behind the seat.

She felt her spirits rising. They had already passed three carts along the way, and now there came two small boys driving a calf. The boys stopped to stare at them, mute and curious, and the calf chose that instant to jump into the woods. Maggie did not mind the boys' staring. It was so wonderful to be travelling where people passed you. Only those who have lived at the end of a long road know what loneliness is. Even in the next house to the last, one can look out and see a person passing once in a while. Here, though few houses were immediately in sight, Maggie had the feeling of people living all around. It was to her a settled country.

The cart went creaking down until the wind no longer blew on her, but was a voice above her head. Then, beyond the trees, the noise of the river tumbling on the Falls became audible, and presently their road turned into the broader highway that was called the Kingsroad and ran all the way to Albany.

Now Dick pointed out the mill to her, and they saw a huge wagon drawn by four horses. One of the militiamen said it was a military wagon and would be hauling flour for the Continental Army. It moved down the carrying road beside the Falls, the wheels chained to help the horses

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hold back; yet even so, they ended galloping.

Maggie glanced at Dick and saw him follow the departing wagon with shining eyes. "He wants to go, too," she thought, and she wondered what would become of them. . . .

Mrs. Mount was staying at Frank's Tavern, but there was no room for Maggie and her father. The house was filled to the last inch, for the garrison of soldiers guarding the carrying place were quartered there. Conrad Frank, the proprietor, said that Dick and Cobus could make themselves comfortable in the haymow of the tavern barn; but he explained that, even if room could be made for the Gordons, it would not be a good place for a sick man, with all the daytime noise and sometimes people rousing the house at night. He thought, however, that some people named Eyseman had extra room in their house and would probably take the Gordons in.

The Eysemans did. They were elderly people, living on a small place back from the Kingsroad, above the Falls and on the edge of the Burnetsfield Patent. They said they had two rooms the Gordons were welcome to use. Maggie soon found out that these rooms had belonged to the Eysemans' two sons, one of whom had been killed in the battle of Oriskany and the other lost.

"I hope he was killed," Mrs. Eyseman said. "I wouldn't want him captivated by the Indians. I've heard some things they did to our people there."

She was a frail woman, with white hair and stilled blue eyes that looked at Maggie without seeming to see her. She

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often appeared to go into a kind of trance, as if she lived entirely in her thoughts; and yet it was she who, once Gordon had been got to bed, suggested that Mr. Eyseman go fetch Dr. Petry from German Flats.

The doctor came next morning, riding up the road along the brook on an old white horse. He did not hold the reins. It looked more as if the horse were fetching Dr. Petry.

The doctor grumbled to himself as he examined Gordon, asking questions now and then of Maggie over his shoulder. He finally told Gordon that he would probably get well; but once outside the room, he took Maggie's arm and led her out of earshot.

"I do not know," he said, shaking his head slowly. "But he must not be disturbed."

"Do you think he's going to die?" Maggie asked after a moment.

"I do not know," the doctor repeated almost harshly. "How can I tell? He must stay quiet a long time."

He named his fee of fifty cents for the eight mile ride he had made and went on to Frank's to see to Cobus's arm. He also had a scalp case over the river, Mrs. Eyseman explained.

"But you must stay as long as you want," she said to Maggie. "You must not worry. It's nice to have a young person in the house again."

Dick walked up to the Eyseman place on the second day, and when Maggie saw him coming along the road, she ran out to meet him. She had seldom felt so happy at seeing anyone; his presence there helped to take away her sense of

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being a stranger in a strange community, and a wave of shyness went over her when she saw that he had some of the same gladness. For a moment they just stood mutely looking at each other, while the cloud shadows passed over them and raced away across the hills beyond the river.

He asked for Gordon then, and when she told him what Dr. Petry had said, he was silent again for a long time. She didn't interrupt his thinking. She was glad just to have him there. And then he said, "Pa's got back."

"Oh, Dick . . ." She was suddenly unable to continue her question.

He nodded. George and Henry were dead.

He waited a moment before going on in a dry, matter-of-fact voice.

All the militia had found was ruins, he said. Everything was burned to ashes—mills, barns, houses. The cow was dead. There wasn't anything. Even lame Blackie had been tracked into the bushes and killed, and the cart had been burned in the road. It was as if the destructives, as the militia men spoke of them, had set out to obliterate every last human vestige north of Fairfield. And they themselves, of course, had had too great a start to be overtaken.

George and Henry, Dick said, after another pause, had been scalped and hatcheted outside the barn. When the militia got there that was all they saw, but a few minutes later they had found Turp hiding on the edge of the woods. The Indians hadn't harmed him and when they were busy burning down the buildings, he had just slipped off into the woods and hidden himself. The reason was, Dick explained,



Maggie had seldom felt so happy at seeing anyone; his presence there helped to take away her sense of being a stranger . . . and a wave of shyness went over her when she saw that he had some of the same gladness.

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that a Negro's hair wouldn't fetch any money from the King's high governor of Canada.

George Mount had sworn he would never go back there to live.

"Pa's through," Dick said. "He wants to get away. He's going back to New Jersey. I came up to see if you'd come and say good-bye to Ma. She'd like it."

"Oh," said Maggie. "When are you starting?"

"Pa says tomorrow."

She couldn't take it in. "Tomorrow?" she repeated. She had expected the Mounts would settle somewhere else. She had never thought of their going all the way back to the Jerseys.

"If you'll wait a minute, Dick, I'll tell Dad where I'm going and I'll come with you now."

All the way down to the Kingsroad and then along the river to the Falls, she felt a strange, lost feeling growing in her. She felt obliged to hide it by talking, and she tried to imagine how nice it would be for them in New Jersey. He made it hard for her; he did not answer or even appear to hear. And suddenly, as they came opposite the rapids under the upper fall, he stopped short.

"I'm not going with them," he said.

"Stay?" she cried.

"Yes. I told Pa I wasn't going with him."

"But didn't he object?"

"Yes," Dick said quietly. "But it didn't do any good."

She drew a long breath and stood utterly still, with the

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roar of the broken river rising up all around her in wave after wave of confused sound. But suddenly she realized that she was seeing Dick clearer than she ever had before. It was as if he had suddenly grown past her, and she was proud. "Dick," she said, letting the pride show in her eyes.

"I've been talking to Adam Dingman," he went on. "Adam thinks maybe I can get to join the rangers. They haven't many who know the north side of the Valley and the Creeks. I'd be on his patrol, if I got in. And they pay fifty-three shillings a month—York money."

"That would be wonderful," she said, but she looked down, thinking of the long patrols. He seemed so young, compared to Adam. And then she realized that being young had little to do with it; they'd gone past the time when they were young.

When she looked up again, she found him watching her.

"Dick," she asked, "do you want to go back to Jersey-field?"

"I don't know if I want to go back there. There's better farming land. But I don't want to get chased away from here. If everybody started clearing out, pretty soon it wouldn't be safe even in Jersey. I want to stick around until it's safe for even kids like George and Henry to be left alone on any farm that's mine or anybody else's."

"That's what I want, too," Maggie said.

She knew it was true. Even if Gordon died, she knew she would stay in the Valley. And she felt in her heart that when the war was over, Dick would still be close to her, as he was now.

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